**Ukraine: The lessons learnt**

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The world seems to have no other choice but to follow the advice proffered by Tolstoy decades ago. If the two most powerful warriors are ‘patience’ and ‘time’, then mankind is helplessly using both in dealing with the instruments and victims of the war in Ukraine. History has once again made it clear that regardless of bilateral, regional or international concerns, you do not jump into any war unless your own ‘interests’ are threatened. Initial reactions including the imposition of West-led sanctions on energy-rich and militarily strong Russia have seemingly been absorbed by Moscow’s cold weather and even colder psyche. The strategists in Kiev have started to believe their worst fears of being left alone when it comes to crunch. Even the powerful and friendly neighbourhood could not go beyond calculating the pros and cons of real-time military and financial support. Promises of direct military involvement also seem to have dissipated in the air.

It is then not surprising that Ukraine has challenged the sublime United Nations to act immediately or ‘dissolve yourself altogether’. Russia’s suspension from HRC is not going to stop the war. Meanwhile, Europe is worrisomely looking at the ever-increasing number of refugees coming from the erstwhile prospective candidate of NATO’s membership. The rest of the world is trying to find ways and means to stay as far from the potential hazards of war as possible. Perhaps, it was time to better understand the post 9/11 dynamics of international relations particularly during war times and draw a few lessons.

One: Never compromise on your nukes on promises of future security.

The war has made a clear distinction between ‘words’ and ‘actions’. Most of the promises made and expectations attached to an imminent military operation were severely jolted soon after the first Russian missile was fired. The US and Europe found it extremely difficult to logically convince Ukraine why Russia would not be confronted head-on or why NATO wouldn’t wait to retaliate unless Russia had used chemical weapons in the war. That Zelensky was taken aback when he saw his country bearing the brunt of a full-scale war on entirely its own would be an understatement. Sadly, it was too late for him to realize that his country was being used as bait to first lure Russia and then force it to bite. Even after producing world class chess players, Ukraine gravely miscalculated Putin’s perceptions, intensions and preparedness.

Two: Might is right even in the 21st century.

No country like Ukraine can become a member of NATO if it borders with Russia or if its President enjoys the West’s blessings. Secondly, if you are militarily strong and happen to be an erstwhile superpower, your actions might be questioned but you could have your way particularly if the man-in-charge is Vladimir Putin. Alongside the Baltic States, almost every European country has realized that after all it was the military might that prevailed over all other arguments. Their threat perception is genuine and immediate. Now they know that even the severest of economic sanctions or the world’s political wrath would not stop an aggressor to annex a disputed area or annihilate a whole country for that matter. Furthermore, none of them now will ever underestimate the sheer power and aggression of a provoked bear.

Three: The world needs a brand-new UN if it desires to save the human race from extinction.

Not that the UN Security Council didn’t desire to stop Russia from its military adventure. However, the use of veto power by Russia in respect of its own aggression thereby effectively precluding the most powerful platform of the world to adopt a resolution provided comic relief to the detractors of the United Nations. Once again the inherent fault-lines in the System have manifestly been exposed, unequivocally proving at least one point: all P-5 members have a license to invade any other country any time with impunity.

Four: All are equal but some are more equal than others.

We feel sorry for the innocent civilian casualties and condemn the aggressor for such inhuman behaviour. We also feel sorry for the schools, hospitals, roads and infrastructure that have been targeted by the aggressor in indiscriminate missile-firing. The internally displaced persons or refugees from Europe would be welcomed by us with open arms. Let there be no mistake. These are neither Afghanis nor Syrians. These are European refugees and we will leave no stone unturned to ensure their security and safety.

Five: Geo-economics takes precedence over geo-politics but the former cannot be pursued without having the jaws and teeth of the latter.

The aggressor and the bystanders kept their eyes constantly focused on bringing Ukraine in the NATO fold as a member. The flourishing Ukrainian economy did not come to rescue the country from devastation. Japan might face the same fate if it is attacked by North Korea tomorrow.

Six: National interest remains the supreme deciding factor in international relations. However, its definition would keep changing until it suits the powers that be.

For Russia, the military operation in Ukraine was in the former’s national interest. Similarly, saving Iraq and Afghanistan from the clutches of tyranny and terrorism was in America’s national interest. China stayed neutral on the war in Ukraine in its own national interest. UAE abstained from voting in its national interest and soon became the unlucky victim of the FATF.

Seven: A pandemic vanishes the moment a European state gets Ukrained.

Due to sudden change in the world’s focus, the pandemic not only stopped from creating another fresh wave but also seemingly decided to leave the human race alone for at least another hundred years. Those who lived through Covid-19 with stressful anguish might like the war in Ukraine to continue until the last variant went back where it came from.

All said and done, the proverbial cat is still in the room and the proverbial pigeon’s eyes are firmly closed.

The writer is a former Ambassador of Pakistan and author of seven books in three languages. He can be reached at najmussaqib  
1960@msn.com

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