**‘Till the storm passes by’**

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I am grateful that my prayers have been heard and there is no new military aggression between Russia and Ukraine in south-eastern Europe. I am not the only one whose prayers have been answered; people, groups and countries that rarely use such religious terms and ways of crisis action seem to have prayed and indeed have been heard, including the independent French, who even keep NATO at arms’ length, the Germans who get more than half of all their gas from Russia, the Americans who after all, keep a distance to Europe but are often closer to God in public language than people in the ‘old world’ and the pragmatic Scandinavians who pray only privately although they do.

Then there are the Chinese, whose majority of people who officially claim they have no religion, as we often hear when we meet some of them in Pakistan. This time, though, during the week of the beginning of the Lunar New Year in the sign of the Tiger and the opening of the Winter Olympic Games, we should thank the Chinese for the prevailing peace in Europe—thus far—because they may have whispered in the ears of the Russia bears, sleep a bit longer, it is still winter and don’t disturb anyone during the Winter Olympic Games are over, and longer, too. It is true that the West is pushing Russia and China closer together, something that it may come to regret later.

[Pakistan condemns hijab ban on Muslim students in Indian state of Karnataka](https://nation.com.pk/09-Feb-2022/pakistan-condemns-hijab-ban-on-muslim-students-in-indian-state-of-karnataka)

I don’t have a crystal ball, but some geopolitical scientist once told me that the super- and great powers have a time-perspective of at least fifty years, even more. There will be new leaders then—even President Putin will be gone—but I believe for now, he is one of the most European-minded in his country, with childhood and youth in St Petersburg near Finland, close to the Baltic States too; time spent in Germany and a vacation home on the Aaland Islands in Finland I have heard, and maybe even a plot in Finnmark, the northern- and easternmost region of Norway, with a long border with Russia, and where so many Russians have vacation homes, in spite of the seasonal mosquito invasion, but people with a very friendly relationship with the Russians, remembering that it was the Russians, when it was still the Soviet Union, that freed them from the Nazi Germany occupation in WWII.

All this and much more count when Russia and NATO ruffle feathers. It is important to remember old, near and contemporary history. I believe we are bad at remembering and interpreting the Russia-Europe history, including that 25 million Russians died in the fight against Nazi Germany. We also seem to have a slippery memory about the end of the Cold War from 1989/90, which was the most significant change in Europe’s politics in our time, including economic and military issues. Isn’t it strange that when this happened only three decades ago, the West seems now to have focused more on ‘reinventing’ a cold war situation than building a new and sustainable relationship between Russia and Europe? The former Soviet Union controlled countries in Europe that got freedom have done well and have made sure they are Western, most of them even EU and NATO members. And Russia has allowed it, well, as it should, but what did it get in return? No, it seems they draw a red line as for how far east NATO, the world’s largest military alliance, can go. Recall, too, that there was an understanding 30 years ago that there was a limit to NATO’s role, and that when the Warsaw Pact was dissolved something should also happen to NATO. Furthermore, after the existence of the Soviet Union from 1917, with later expansions, little seems to have been done—by the West—to assist Russia in building a democracy. It is true that although communism had many positive aspects too, it had many, many negative aspects, indeed with regards to the development of a democratic culture.

[FM Qureshi, Sheikh Abdullah agree to further enhance bilateral cooperation](https://nation.com.pk/09-Feb-2022/fm-qureshi-sheikh-abdullah-agree-to-further-enhance-bilateral-cooperation)

I read a column in Norway’s largest newspaper VG on 30.01.22, written by Sanna Sarromaa, a feminist from a Finnish-Russian border area, now a fiction writer and analyst based in Norway. She said in the article that you cannot have better friends than the Russians, on a private basis, but no less unreliable friends on a state-level; people don’t know what the central government does and they go along with it anyway. This is probably true for most people and countries, also in the US and other big powers. Well, everywhere there are pockets of independent protesters, but in Russia, they are few, and they pay a price. Besides, to be in opposition is something that individuals and groups must learn in a democracy.

Again, why was the West, especially the Europeans so naive, not assisting the Russians after the communist era? Everyone ought to have understood that a proud regime that had just collapsed would need advice and help to build a new, democratic regime with institutions that would be able to take part in and implement democracy, yes, in Western ways, or even other more democratic ways. Alas, the West didn’t want to see this. I am puzzled over the West’s neglect, damaging and delaying developments in Russia and the Russia-Europe relations. The most important thing the West and Russia can do now is to engage in trust-building measures, in spite of all the suspicion that now exists, especially as long as NATO is allowed to have such a prominent place in the public debate.

[Bilal Yasin case: Naseem Vicky's father, brother granted interim bail](https://nation.com.pk/09-Feb-2022/bilal-yasin-case-naseem-vicky-s-father-brother-granted-interim-bail)

The current conflict, said to be close to war and a Russian invitation of Ukraine, may have been a manifestation of Russia’s need for closer cooperation with Europe, contradicting as it sounds, with the deployment of up to a hundred thousand Russian soldiers on Ukraine’s borders. True, Russia did annex Crimea in 2014, and the West still keeps up sanctions against Russia. If there should be another invasion of Ukraine territories, wider sanctions would be put in place. However, we all pray this will not happen.

It should be noted that Ukraine’s president since May 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky (44), a trained lawyer and a gifted comedian and TV personality, has said that he does not see Russia pulling out of Crimea unless there is a regime change in Russia. He has also said that the use of Russian language in Ukraine, one of the country’s two main languages, shall not be restricted. When he was elected president, he was for closer dialogue with Russia. Let us pray for that to happen, and let us help him realise that.

[UK premier plans to end all COVID-19 restrictions a month early](https://nation.com.pk/09-Feb-2022/uk-premier-plans-to-end-all-covid-19-restrictions-a-month-early)

I began my article today with theological references, and the title of the article refers to a hymn written by an American Baptist, Mosie Lister (1921-2015), “Keep me safe till the storm passes by”. Thus far, our prayers have been heard. I hope we keep up our faith and implement the right secular actions; that goes for President Zelensky, who is Jewish, President Putin, who is a Catholic, and the rest of us, Muslims and others in Pakistan, the US, Europe, China, and everywhere else. Let us keep praying for each other and for peace in Europe and the world—and for a sustainable Kashmir solution when the ‘Kashmir Solidarity Day’ is marked on 5 February.