**Kashmir and Powers that Be(Part-II)**

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The Nation

China’s BRI-CPEC initiatives are well on their way to fruition. The CPEC that passes through Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), a region with Pakistan, is the flagship project of the BRI. Its success will signify a win-win model for all those who sign up to the BRI. CPEC’s failure, on the other hand, will dent China’s regional and global economic stature, credibility and stunt its ostensible challenge to the US’ singular position as the dominant global economic power. Predictably, the BRI-CPEC have attracted the ire of the US, India etc, however, the Chinese economic juggernaut marches on relentlessly, regardless.

Three India-China issues merit attention here; Aksai Chin-Ladakh in the larger Kashmir region, Arunachal Pradesh in India’s North East and India’s frivolous objections to the CPEC passing through GB. India claims Aksai Chin as the eastern most part of Ladakh. China claims Aksai Chin as part of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Thus, two of these issues link China directly with the overall Kashmir imbroglio. This brings the national interests of three nuclear powers to clash ominously in the Kashmir region. India has recently “annexed” the Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJ&K) region and Ladakh and appropriated them as Union Territories. China has summarily rubbished these theoretical absurdities, reiterated their disputed status and its own legitimate claim to Ladakh. Furthermore, the CPEC connects Xinjiang through GB to the Mekran Coast/Gwadar, a link that has enormous geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic connotations. The CPEC will dramatically alter the power matrix within Asia, giving a profound strategic advantage to China. With the CPEC in place, its massive roads, motorways and eventual rail networks will enable China to not only outflank India from the West but also the US and Allied forces in the Pacific. Chinese presence on the Mekran Coast will force the US and its allies’ (including India) in the Pacific and Indian Oceans to look over their shoulders, dividing and dissipating their military efforts. Most importantly China, thus becomes a two-ocean nation and nullifies drastically the strategic advantage of the Malacca Straits chokepoint to the US and its allies. Therefore, the US’ and India’s unrelenting efforts to demonize, dismantle, denigrate, disrupt and destroy the CPEC as it passes through GB and moves southwards!

A conventional-nuclear war in Kashmir will inevitably suck in China and enhance the ferocity, scope and theatre of war manifold. It might seriously derail and delay the BRI-CPEC but that will be a pitiable, untenable, pyrrhic victory for the US and its allies, especially India. China cannot possibly be contained and managed thus. It is therefore in China’s and everyone else’s interest too, to obviate war and ensure a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir problem(s) as per UN/UNSC resolutions.

Other players on the global chessboard must also play their parts. The European Union has massive investments and trade relations with India. It too can ill afford a conventional-nuclear war/winter over Kashmir as that will disrupt most regional and global economies including European ones. The Arab states, especially KSA and the UAE have made substantial investments in India. They would have done much better had they used their huge investments of billions upon billions of dollars in the Indian economy as a leverage to block the Hindutva crazed BJP government’s crusade against the Indian Muslims, especially the genocide in Kashmir. A conventional-nuclear war over Kashmir will seriously jeopardise their investments in India and forestall the transformation of their respective economies and societies. The UN has been the weakest player in the international community. It has failed to maintain a fair, just and peaceful international order inescapably falling prey to the veto wielding P-5. Kashmir has lingered on its agenda since 1948 as a festering wound. The UN must enforce its Resolutions on Kashmir and move in now to forestall what will be a devastating conventional-nuclear war/winter that may affect more than half of humanity.

The Sangh Parivaar-RSS-BJP Combine has been committing one faux pas after the other. The debacle in IOJ&K, the irrational Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register for Citizens have evoked a spontaneous backlash from the public across all political spectrums in India. India is on fire! The BJP Government has held the Kashmiris incommunicado and under a debilitating curfew for the last five months, or so. The international community remains largely insensitive to the atrocities being visited upon them.

India needs a paradigm shift in its approach towards Pakistan. Its megalomaniac images of itself are patently delusional. It cannot possibly defeat Pakistan, a significant nuclear and military power in its own right, to “conquer and annex” Azad Jammu & Kashmir. Any foolhardy attempts will clearly go much beyond the “nuclear overhang” the Indians erroneously think they can limit a war to. Kargil ‘99, might not be the right example to emulate. If India were to resolve Kashmir and other outstanding issues with Pakistan it stands to gain enormously. It can benefit from the East-West trade routes from the Greater Middle East Region and CARs through Pakistan to India. Similarly, the North South trade corridors linking China and the CARs to the Arabian Sea could branch off to India as well. Furthermore, India could also be considered for inclusion in the CPEC initiative – though terms and conditions would apply. If instead, it initiates a conventional-nuclear war astride the LOC, it must remain aware that it cannot possibly be a war limited in intent, scope and objectives. India might start it; Pakistan will decide how, when and where to end it! However, in its Hindutva laden frenzy, PM Modi and his megalomaniac BJP Government appear adamant to take the whole region and the better part of the world down in flames with themselves. They are losing control of the situation rapidly!

The world seems hesitant to address much less resolve Kashmir conclusively due to the conflicting geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic interests of the global powers that be. This reticence on the part of the international community portends dire consequences for the Indo-Pak subcontinent, South Asia, Asia and the world at large.

Kashmir holds the key to global peace and prosperity! The world ought to take note and act, pronto!!

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