**The Perils of Populist approach to Foreign Relations**

[Ambassador G R Baluch](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/ambassador-g-r-baluch/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20Ambassador%20G%20R%20Baluch)

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The treaty of Westphalia in 1648 laid the foundations of the modern state system in Europe; the treaty is historically considered a seminal historical event on which the edifice of the modern Nation-state has been built and subsequently a comprehensive treatise on the theory and practice of International Relations has evolved. The Treaty of Westphalia fundamentally changed the basis of statehood, the ethnic nationalism was replaced by territorial nationalism. Nevertheless, ethnic nationalism remained a dominant impulse and a driver of interstate conflicts on the one hand and the other hand was used as a convenient tool by different political and military rulers to justify their rule often autocratic and undertake military campaigns. Hitler successfully used German ethnic nationalism to grab power and ignited the most devastating Second World War. The populist Foreign Policy approach presupposes an outside enemy more often a bigger/more powerful country/ countries, which is supposed to present an existential, ideological, economic, or territorial threat. In the recent past; we have witnessed populist leaders, parties and movements have taken a populist approach to foreign relations to shore up domestic constituencies and browbeat opponents by dubbing them as stooges of foreign forces. The Revolution in Iran led by Ayatullah Khomeini used anti-Americanism as a major battle cry of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Similarly, populist leaders in Central and Latin America as well as in Europe exploited such public sentiments in the conduct of their Foreign Policy to rally support for their often authoritarian rule. India under Hindu Nationalist Prime Minister Narinder Mondi has pursued a nationalistic/populist Foreign Policy and has used the pretext of Pakistani support to Kashmiri freedom struggle to annex Kashmir in violation of UN resolutions and has pursued aggressive policy towards Pakistan. Most recently brought the two Nuclear-Capable neighbours to the verge of a Nuclear Standoff. Prime Minister Modi has also alienated all other smaller South Asian neighbouring countries while pursuing a populist/Nationalistic Foreign Policy. There has been a distinct Nationalist and Populist approach in the conduct of Foreign Relations by the Russian Republic under Mr Putin as witnessed in several Military interventions in the former Soviet Republics to revive the erstwhile USSR, which reflected Russian public sentiment. In his latest push for his populist Foreign Policy of expansion, he invaded Ukraine, terming it a “Special Military mission.” The Ukrainian cities have been pulverized, the war has resulted in thousands of civilian causalities and an exodus of over three million Ukrainians to neighbouring countries. The Russian Invasion of Ukraine also brought the spectre of a nuclear third world war between the two superpowers into the realm of a “Possibility.”

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The US foreign policy under Mr Trump was premised on his populist “America First” populist and nationalistic slogan, resulting in the US tearing apart major Multilateral Agreements/Treaties, which included withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ( JCPOA), The Paris Climate Accord and abrogation of NAFTA. Mr Trump termed NATO “Obsolete” and is reported to have considered quitting the military alliance. Trumps’ populist impulse to conduct foreign relations triggered a trade war between the US and China. Mr Trump’s populist approach to Foreign Relations resulted in the diminishing of the US stature as a Global Power. As a result, President Biden in his first year in office has only been busy repairing the damage done to the US role as a World Leader; under the previous administration.

Mr Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto is a historical exception, who as a Foreign Minster as well as President and Prime Minister, deftly synthesised his Populist approach to the foreign relations with the fundamentals of a realist approach to Foreign Policy. He recognized Bangladesh formerly East Pakistan After getting the approval of the public at mammoth public rallies.

We witnessed another manifestation of the Populist approach to Foreign Policy when Mr Imran Khan while addressing a public rally on 27 March in Islamabad claimed that he had received a threatening letter from a foreign country and that the No-confidence move against his Government was sponsored by that foreign country. According to analysts this move by Mr Imran khan fits in the stereotype of leaders mentioned above, who have used populist foreign policies to shore up their domestic vote bank and build a narrative for the next elections which may be called within this year. Whatever the political motives for such flimsy evidence of external interference in the internal political dynamics of Pakistan, the political melee surrounding the alleged letter sent by the former Pakistan envoy to Washington would cast a shadow on Pakistan’s relations with the alleged foreign country referred to in the ” Letter” on the one hand and the other it could dampen the morale of our envoys abroad in terms of their willingness to share their candid and objective assessment about their interaction with their respective host government officials, for the fear that these assessments may be shared with the public subsequently by senior Public officeholders. Confidentiality and credibility constitute the core of conduct of Foreign Relations in this increasingly complex world, any move or action which undermines these two fundamental pillars of the conduct of successful diplomacy would have grave consequences for the foreign relations of the country.

Pakistan is a nuclear-capable country with the sixth-largest Army in the world and has an important role in the Comity of Nations. We have huge economic and political challenges as a country. An attempt by any leader to circumscribe our foreign relations choices by applying a populist approach to foreign relations could have enormous political and economic costs to the country at the international level. Pakistan needs to pursue a Foreign Policy strictly informed by our vital security, economic and political national interests. Pakistan’s Foreign Policy must be insulated from vested personal or group interests.

*The writer is former Ambassador of Pakistan to Vietnam*