**[The creeping Armageddon](https://nation.com.pk/15-Feb-2020/the-creeping-armageddon" \t "_new)**

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Pakistan apparently lies in the path of this creeping Armageddon as, when and if it creeps East of Iran. Whether it engages Pakistan or not will largely be a function of Iran’s resilience, Israel’s degree of perceived insecurity, Pakistan’s very significant military-nuclear-missile capabilities (and its vulnerabilities), China’s presence (BRI-CPEC) in the region and the US-led West’s vital interests in the Greater Middle East Region-North Africa (GMER-NA) and South Central Asian Region. This makes for a very explosive concoction of clashing geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic interests of the major powers of the world and Pakistan could well be at the hub of it all!

The time and the timing of this engagement of Pakistan will be extremely crucial. The longer it takes to “neutralize” Pakistan, the stronger it will get militarily and economically (BRI-CPEC). The world must realize that it is next to impossible to get a nation to “unlearn” being a significant military-nuclear-missile power, especially when it is determined to withstand all coercion towards that end. Pakistan will never give in. Period. So, will it be a post-Iran undertaking or will it at some stage become a simultaneous one by the US-led West and its allies? Given the emerging strategic environment, is it not in Pakistan’s national interest too, that Iran remains defiant, resilient and unconquered for as long as is possible?

Pakistan cannot be isolated and subdued like some of the nations in the GMER-NA were. China’s ominous presence in Pakistan and the region will by itself act as a deterrent. It is unlikely to allow uncontested operations against its BRI-CPEC. Russia too is making a strong ingress into Pakistan and the region. The KSA-led GCC will not lose nuclear Pakistan as an ally of substance either. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will acquire political, economic and military dimensions, in time. A probable grouping of China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, (CRIPT) as a subset of the SCO, could emerge as a competing pole to the US-led West and actually bring about a modicum of balance in the regional and global affairs!

Pakistan is likely to be confronted with a coercive policy having external and internal dimensions. The external approach will have two basic prongs, kinetic and non-kinetic. The kinetic prong will have two pincers, one on each flank of Pakistan. India will be tasked to increase hostilities, skirmishes across the LOC in Kashmir and will be encouraged to carry out false flag operations and then blame Pakistan for state sponsored terrorist activities. The international community will then be required to put crippling economic and other sanctions on Pakistan. Simultaneously, the western front will be activated. The plethora of terrorist groups in Afghanistan will activate their sleeper cells in Pakistan and initiate violent terrorist attacks. The projects of the BRI-CPEC will be their main targets. They will contest Pakistan’s fencing of the Pak-Afghan border as it blocks their drug smuggling routes as well. Activities on both flanks of Pakistan will be closely synchronized and synergized in purpose and effect.

Pakistan can deal with external threats with ease, confidence and elan, however its Achille’s Heel has always been its internal front. Pakistan’s earlier Governments were rather weak and prone to external pressures from the US-led West and its allies. They proved to be either incompetent or complicit or both as they went about destroying Pakistan’s economy, its state enterprises, strategic institutions, organizations etc and piling up insurmountable international debts. They topped it up through massive, institutionalized corruption. Thus, a near compromised political elite, an unstable political and social environment and a very weak economy have together created the conditions for exploitation by the powers that be. This situation could be vitiated further through terrorist attacks, sectarian upheavals and “nationalist” movements timed to perfection with external pressures. The internal front is thus getting primed to implode!

Pakistan is thus likely to face a simultaneous, well-coordinated multidimensional assault and must be prepared for all contingencies. It must never be caught unawares, without options or viable strategies for a potentially very explosive regional environment. At the geopolitical level, it must try to de-escalate the issues between the US-led West and Iran and KSA and Iran. It must try to block any further advance of this deadly Armageddon through skilful diplomacy. Simultaneously, without prejudice to how the US-led West proceeds with its strategy, it must encourage, promote and initiate talks on the SCO-CRIPT acquiring tangible political, economic and military dimensions. Multipolarity must emerge to create balance in global affairs. Furthermore, China will inevitably secure its massive investments in the region. Pakistan and China may eventually gravitate towards a mutually supporting formal defence arrangement to secure converging national interests including the BRI-CPEC! At the geostrategic level Pakistan must reiterate that its military-nuclear-missile powers are India-centric and that they comprise its full spectrum defence capabilities against a very belligerent, hostile and unpredictable neighbour. However, it must state unequivocally too that it has the capacity and the will to defend itself against all threats, regardless of the quarter they emanate from! At the geo-economic level, it is now imperative that the BRI-CPEC projects in Pakistan reach fruition. Pakistan must become the hub of all the East-West and North-South trade corridors that are bound to crisscross the region.

Pakistan must try to avert the further advance of this Armageddon, diplomatically. However, if and when push comes to shove, a nuclear weapon-ballistic missile toting militarily weighty Pakistan is most unlikely to just roll over and die!