**Imperialist obsessions**

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Putin had his gaze fixed on enormous untapped energy reserves in Ukraine where natural gas reserves are estimated to be at 5.4 trillion cubic metres. Most of the hydrocarbon resources are concentrated in its Eastern regions, which are now under Russian occupation. The Dnieper-Donetsk in the East and the Black Sea-Sea of Azov in the South account for 80% of the proven reserves and 90% of all gas production. Ukraine is thus the sixth country in the world in terms of the largest coal reserves.
To invade Ukraine, Russian forces made three pronged land incursions. In that, her push from the North towards Kiev and Kharkiv was stalled, compelling it to withdraw and refocus on East and South. Targeting full control of the South, Russian forces made rapid gains there, created a land bridge between Crimea and areas held by Russian-backed separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk. As the Russian campaign continues in Ukraine with incremental territorial gains in the East and South, 5.6 million Ukrainians have migrated to EU states and Moldova.
Ukrainian forces inflicted significant losses on the Russian side with the support of NATO trainers, European volunteers, anti-armour, anti-aircraft hardware, lethal artillery, surveillance drones, and calibrated intelligence provided by USA and the Europe. As Russia is slowly making gains in the East and South, emboldened America and Europe together have stepped up their overt and clandestine support to Ukrainian fighting forces and volunteers. Recently, US Congress has approved $40 billion in aid for Ukraine. European allies clubbed together, are now providing sizeable weaponry that could blunt Russian military incursions.
This calibrated and lingering war may ensue permanent Russian occupation of the Southern, Eastern regions of Ukraine and critical marginalisation of her forces. Having achieved this and downscaling her stated objectives, Russia would derive victory over the occupied Ukrainian territories. Diplomacy would then come in play for ceasing military operations. While this appears to be a workable scenario for Putin though much against his anticipations, permanent loss of territory and sea denial remain unacceptable to Ukraine.
Alternatively, continuation of low grade war with heightened West supported proxies would leave Ukraine mutilated, however would entrap Russia in a long conflict at the cost of her global pursuits, and economic isolation due to sanctions. This would reduce Putin’s stature globally and cost him his domestic legitimacy, meaning strategic defeat for him.
Walking on a tight rope due to fear of nuclear escalation, the USA may not invest in the complete liberation of Ukrainian occupied areas causing unacceptable humiliation to Russia. The continuation of a proxy war with regulated material and human resourcing would keep ambitious Putin bogged down locally.
As a consequence of the three months old war, Putin achieved significant objectives of occupying energy rich regions in Ukraine, marginalising her military and ensuring sea denial to the beleaguered neighbor. Contrarily, his claim of overrunning Ukraine with lightning speed, dismantling its regime, challenging European security with weakening American influence, all fell flat.
After aggressing in Ukraine, Putin emerged responsible for exacerbating energy and food crisis globally. Russia and Ukraine combined produce 28% of the world’s wheat and maize. Naval blockade on Ukrainian ports at Black Sea could trigger a global food catastrophe that may cause starvation, immigration and political instability.
America emerged stronger after enabling Ukraine to resist complete Russian invasion, embroiling Russia through proxies as well as re-harnessing Europe to contain Russia. As a safeguard against energy blackmailing, Europe has started to seek alternate energy sources.
Putin’s few failures are alluded to his overreliance on the military that still carries Soviet era culture and military hardware limitations. His judgement on Trans-Atlantic military resourcefulness, commitment and American influence on Europe was flawed. Sole reliance on nuclear formidability in dissuading USA and Europe from interfering was misplaced. In short, his stratagem brought global economic disarray, and far more stresses on the Russian isolated economy.
In this complex global dynamics, where Ukrainian invasion has brought multiple challenges for the world including energy and food crisis, Pakistan has been significantly affected because of our vulnerabilities. Pakistan’s policies need to be dispassionate and to be based on principles consistent with national interest and global functioning.
With the economic baggage and resultant dependency on IMF, buying cheap Russian gas and oil in defiance to internationally endorsed sanction regime is over simplistic. Irrespective of alignment, our overtures should be balanced, well thought and based on principles we demand from the world. Not condemning naked aggression on territorial integrity of the Ukraine renders us inconsistent with the principal position we always take with respect to Indian hegemony in our region.