

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Cold War came to an end after the Soviet Union imploded in 1991. That also meant the end of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. Hereafter the US was the sole superpower in a unipolar world. But the Chinese economy and military power began growing at the beginning of the millennium. Also, Russian President Putin was able to consolidate his power and stabilise the country by around 2005.

Meanwhile, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has continued to advance eastwards, adding many Warsaw Pact countries into its fold. Finally, the only buffer between NATO and Russia comprised Belarus and Ukraine. A pro-West government got elected in Ukraine after the “Revolution of Dignity” in 2014. This was a strategically inconvenient position for Russia. Russia’s Black Sea fleet was housed in Crimea, with a special arrangement with Ukraine. This came under the threat of a takeover. Russia then arranged to annexe Crimea. By 2021, there was a strong move for Ukraine to join NATO. This was the “Cuba Moment” for Russia. It gave repeated warnings to Ukraine and the West to stem such a move. Finally, when it thought the water had flowed over the head, Russia invaded Ukraine. Despite huge financial and military equipment support from the West, 20 per cent of Eastern Ukrainian territory is with Russia. Russia could also circumvent the economic sanctions with the support of many major countries, including China and India.

The ground situation is at a stalemate. While the West continues to support Ukraine, public opinion in the USA and some European countries is seeing war-fatigue, and fund flows are slowing down. The Pope has suggested that President Zelensky of Ukraine should initiate talks for a ceasefire and a final, mutually acceptable solution. The West considers it a war between democracy and autocracy.

Around 2013, the all-powerful Xi Jinping came to power in China. China then usurped nearly 3 million sq.km. in the South China Sea and added a huge Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In the process, many Southeast Asian countries lost their EEZ. When the International Court of Arbitration gave a ruling in favour of the challenger, Philippines, China refused to accept it. China also used the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and financial inducements to expand its influence. Those tactics were only partially successful.

However, China's fast growing large economy did make it a very significant military and space power. It began challenging the USA for global influence. Meanwhile, the free economies and democracies of the region began forming groupings. The USA, Japan, Australia and India formed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) security grouping to promote freedom of the seas. Meanwhile, China's economic growth rate began slowing. Also, after the one-child policy, the population started ageing, resulting in a worsening demography. Autocratic China has serious territorial issues with most of its neighbours. Unification of Taiwan remains a major priority. Territorial claims against India, Japan, and some others have resulted in skirmishes.

As the post-Cold War era comes to an end, Russia has been pushed towards China, much to its displeasure. A new form of global competition is beginning. Some are terming it as "Cold War II". The USA wants all free world countries to invest more in their defence. The military budgets of all NATO countries and Japan are going up. Public opinion in Germany, Japan and South Korea is in favour of acquiring nuclear weapons for deterrence and security.

Meanwhile, West Asia is also on fire. The Israel-Hamas War continues even after nearly 35,000 casualties. The Iran-backed Houthis and Hezbollah are active against Israel and the Western allies. The Houthis are attacking commercial shipping passing through the Red Sea, forcing many ships to take the long route around the Cape of Good Hope, adding huge costs.

2024 is also the ultimate election year. Globally, there are polls in around 64 countries (plus the European Union), representing a combined population of about 49 per cent of the people. Major countries, including the USA, Russia, India, the UK, Pakistan, Iran,

Bangladesh, South Africa, among others will be having elections. While the outcomes in Russia may be well known, the outcome in the USA can have global policy implications.

This issue of *Defence and Diplomacy* looks at many important subjects and issues. Pakistan has the gift of geographical location. It has been important for US interests in West and Central Asia. It became part of the US led Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO), and Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in the 1950s. The Pakistan Army controlling the country suited the USA. But the Pakistan-US relations can best be characterised as “blow-hot-blow-cold”, “roller coaster” with highs and lows. The USA used Pakistan during the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, but found it playing an undercutting role during its war against terror in the last two decades. Ever since, US policy-makers have been revisiting the relationship. Also, the Indo-US strategic convergence has brought pressure on Pakistan and made it more inclined and dependent on China. The Pakistanis remain amongst the least favourable people in the USA. We look at the play in the current situation.

India's relations with its island neighbours have been rather dynamic. While they are all conscious of the fact that India is the big brother nearby, and the first responder in crisis situations, they have often played the China-card to extract more out of the relationship. While for India, it is important to keep China out of the region.

China has been an active player in grey zone activities. It has used them to deter, dissuade, and mitigate its rivals' competitive advantages, and seeks to pressure Taiwan, the United States, and others to act according to its interests. These activities are part of China's plan to solve territorial disputes, such as the Senkaku Islands, the South China Sea, and unification with Taiwan.

During the Taliban insurgency, the Islamic State (IS) established itself in Khorasan and formed the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP). The main objective of the ISKP was to occupy the area of Khorasan that includes Afghanistan. Even though the initial ISKP was formed by the Taliban as well as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) defectors and, thus, is ideologically similar, it became dominated by the Salafists. The disgruntled members of the TTP established the ISKP and shifted to the Nangarhar province. The dynamics between

the ISKP and Taliban have been ever evolving and need close watch and study. Also, the game plan of the TTP could have implications not only for Pakistan, but also for India.

As China's interest in Central and West Asia increases, it is important for India to strengthen its own relations. The US has a significant footprint in West Asia, and Central Asia is a backyard of Russia and, therefore, there is a multi-nation play. Till now, India has played its cards well and there is a positive upswing in its relations.

As China grows more powerful, and there are territorial disputes with Japan, the security of Japan has become of concern. Till now, the US was providing the security umbrella, but now it wants the regional allies to take greater responsibility. Japan is, hence, coming out of its long held pacifism, and has begun increasing its defence expenditure, which will soon be close to 2 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Japan is clearly recalibrating its security and foreign policies.

With increased computerisation, and networking of all activities, cyber is fast becoming a major war-fighting domain. Cyber crimes are also increasing. Protection of the financial and defence networks from adversary attacks has become of utmost importance.

With exponential increase in global aviation, automation, and new technologies, there is a constant need to revisit aviation safety. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) have made it possible for both prediction and prevention of unsafe events. There is a need to build national databases and a safety grid. Lastly, we review the book *Airpower Pioneers: From Billy Mitchell to David Deptula*.

Defence and Diplomacy remains an important quarterly journal of the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS). We encourage strategic studies and also invite more participation in aerospace research and writing. While we have an online version of the journal, the pleasure of owning and reading a hard copy is quite different.

Happy Reading!

Jai Hind

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