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EMERGING GEOPOLITICS

Crisis in Ukraine: Humanity is the Biggest Loser

DEBA R MOHANTY , DSR, MARCH 05, 2022

Different media groups have produced contrasting perceptions of the situation in Ukraine thus far. Internet and social media sources are full of deep fakes, leaving the common citizens divided virtually along with Russian and non-Russian narratives. But, the reality on the ground is that as of March 1, 2022, Russia is in complete control of significant parts of Ukraine's territory. Russian troops are about to surround Kyiv and have fired missiles on Kharkiv, Chernihiv and fourteen other areas. On February 28, 2022, at the behest of the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, delegations from Ukraine and Russia met at the Pripyat River on the Ukraine-Belarus border, north of Chernobyl, an area that is currently under Russian military control round, and tried to diffuse the crisis. However, the talks failed, leading to a situation whereby US and NATO members started pledging



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material support to Ukraine and scrambled their military assets for defence or retaliation to any possible action by Russia beyond Ukrainian territory. Ceasefire talks will resume on March 3, 2022, again between Russia and Ukraine, this time along the border between Poland and Belarus.

Ukraine has been formally accepted as a new member of the European Union. United Nations Security Council has thus far been proved ineffective as Russia has used its veto power, China and India have abstained, while most others have supported the US. However, on March 2, 2022, at least 141 out of 193 members voted for an immediate ceasefire and deplored in the strongest terms on the situation in Ukraine. Russia, Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea and Syria voted against this resolution, while 34 members abstained, including India. This was done under the U4P resolution of the UN. Different other options are also available – a case against Russia in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) under the Genocide Convention (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide) or make Russia a trade pariah through suspension of Russia's most favoured nation (MFN) status under the rules of World Trade Organization (WTO) by invoking article XXI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Severe economic sanctions, mainly trade and financial, have been imposed on Russia by the US, NATO, Japan and South Korea. Contradictory claims are coming on the protection of critical nuclear facilities like in Chernobyl or Zaporizhzhya.

As a response to NATO's direct support to Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered the Defence Minister Army General Sergey Shoygu and the Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov to put all land, air and naval-based nuclear deterrent forces in a 'special regime of

combat duty. It is interesting to note that less than a year ago, Russian President Putin and US President Biden had said that 'the threat of nuclear war was a Cold War relic'. "Nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought," they both had agreed. Few are aware that nuclear deterrent forces of all nuclear powers are always in a state of readiness, only they are not announced. In sum, the ground reality suggests that Russians have not yet stepped back, neither agreed to any proposal floated for de-escalation and Ukrainians have clung to their position. In this stalemate situation, Russian forces appear ever eager to achieve their politico-military objectives at any cost. In pure military and diplomatic terms, it is an advantage Russia till date.



Russia-Ukraine Conflict 2022

If Russia is blamed for this crisis, the opposite western world is equally blamed for creating it. It is well known by now that historical narratives aside, it was the disintegration of the Soviet Union and incessant humiliations meted out to the Russians by the West for the last three decades, which has resulted in Russian determination to teach the West a lesson or two. If this crisis spills over to Taiwan Straits, signs of which are slowly emerging, it will be a different scenario altogether. Economic sanctions would then remain the only possible option as both Russia and China will use their veto power in UNSC to thwart any overt military action against them. Sanctions have seldom worked in the cases of Iran, North Korea or Myanmar. Even there was minimal impact on India when it conducted nuclear tests and came under severe sanctions. Preparatory stages of military interventions (as the Russians put it) or war (as the Americans claim) consider the widest possible sanctions by initiators/aggressors. It is assumed that Russia will be impacted to a certain extent, but alternate routes always open up when there is a crisis. It is now fairly assumed that Russia will not bulge till its strategic objectives are met. At the same time, the US and NATO members would find it difficult to an overt retaliation as Ukraine is not yet a NATO member. The more material support Ukraine gets, the more prolonged will be the battle, which will pay targeted strategic dividends to Russia, which may overthrow Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the near future and replace him with former Ukrainian President and Russia loyalist Viktor Yanukovich.

While all kinds of actions and counter-actions, claims and counter-claims, boastful threats and counter-threats are floating around, it is the deep fakes produced and propagated incessantly by opposite groups (pro-Russia and anti-Russia) that have equally damaging capacities as those created by military forces on the ground. Instances of satellite pictures, morphed videos, racist action and behaviour, stage-managed humanitarian crisis (often camouflaging the real scenario) and controlled distortions have flooded in all forms of print, video and audio-visual communication. In this scenario, deep fakes are different from the 'reality distortion field', a concept actualized by the founder of Apple – Steve Jobs – which enabled the power of technology for the global good. Deep fakes have more destructive powers that distort real pictures and, more importantly, crystallize human thinking processes. In the absence of complete data on actual ground situations in Ukraine, its border military and non-military actions will encourage deep fakes further and create distorted pictures on both sides of the fence. If anti-Russian or anti-Chinese feelings are stronger day by day, so are anti-American and anti-West. One does not know the exact time of the inflexion point.

India's nuanced and perceived ambivalent position on the crisis has brought mixed results thus far. Russians are happy. Americans are unhappy but can not do much. Chinese are apprehensive of Indian intents. Ukrainians hoped for Indian overt support but were disappointed. Elsewhere, states are appropriating their strategies to deal with all eventualities. Even though India is not yet a member of the high table in technical terms, its stature and location have grown in global affairs.

And amid all this, Ukraine is sandwiched between global power games and innocent citizenry across Europe and elsewhere is the biggest victim.

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BRIEF: No.1

*Course Corrections in Military Production***PILLORIED YET PERFORMING: DIRECTIONS IN STATE-OWNED DEFENCE PUBLIC**

In a pleasant coincidence, one hears about India recently signing a contract with the Philippines worth USD 370 million for selling Brahmos cruise missiles. Possibilities of follow on orders for Brahmos by the Philippines are also discussed. Countries in South East Asia like Vietnam, Indonesia and others have shown expression of interest in buying varieties of military systems like Tejas fighters, Brahmos, artillery systems and military electronic items. On the west side of India, countries from the Middle East and Africa and far off countries in Latin and South America have also shown interest in acquiring different Indian military products. Dubbed not so long ago as a 'weapons merchants' paradise for being import-dependent, spending close to 80 per cent of the military capital budget, India of late appears to have activated multiple fronts in its military, scientific and industrial complex (MSIC).



India and Philippines Brahmos Deal

Although reforms in higher military organizations and MSIC have been underway since 2002 onward along with comprehensive initiatives in policy, procedural and structural-institutional levels, India has created a large landscape of optimism, curiosity and enthusiasm in the MSIC, especially for the last five to six years. Consider these: a) between 2002 and 2014, nine high-level committees had suggested more than 200 suggestions for reforms in the Indian military sector, b) procurement procedures had undergone nine reviews, c) performance review of offsets in defence production and d) announcement of a general defence production policy had happened.

Now, consider these as well: a) recommendations of only one Committee (Lt Gen D B Shekhatkar Committee) have been implemented in a focused manner, b) procurement procedures have three reviews, c) a new improvised defence production policy unveiled, d) offloading certain per cent of stakes by the government in all Defence Public Sector Units (DPSUs) and making seven out of nine DPSUs listed public entities

(two DPSUs were already listed in the stock market, and five more were added during this period), e) restructuring all 42 numbers of Ordnance Factories under the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) into seven corporate entities in 2020, all or any of which may get listed in the next three to four years time horizon; and f) last but not the least, bringing out both negative and positive lists as well as introducing many similar initiatives to inject market-induced energies into the government-owned entities.

It will not be wrong to say that massive and all-encompassing reform initiatives in the Indian military-industrial sector have thus far been spectacularly enabling as well as disruptive, whose directions appear increasingly clear: the government will handhold defence entities, give them all support, let them swim in the global arms market, expect reasonable performance in return, encourage a few big private entities (like Tata Advanced Systems Limited, Mahindra Defence, Bharat Forge, Adani Defence, L&T, Godrej and a few others) to hold hands with their government counterparts or operate independently in the global arms market, help MSMEs and startups as well as provide the bulk of funding for different design and prototype developments by any entity.

Amid all these, the performance of most listed DPSUs has been reasonably good in the last five years. Both listed and unlisted DPSUs have been paying regular dividends to the government. For example, missile manufacturer Bharat Dynamics Limited announced a dividend of INR 100 crore in its last board meeting on 4 March 2022, while total dividends paid by all DPSUs crossed 9,000 crores in FY 2021-22. Order books of established companies like Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Mazagaon Dockyard Limited (MDL), BDL or Bharat Electronics Limited are reasonably healthy in excess of INR 20,000 crores. Profits after tax (PAT) figures for all DPSUs hover between 12 to 17 per cent and above INR 5,000 crore for each of the last five years (past two years cumulative profit crossed INR 6,000 crore) is quite impressive by any industry standard. It must be noted here that except for a few companies like Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML), BEL, Goa Shipyard or Garden Reach Shipyard and Engineers (GRSE), all other companies produce niche products and have a monopoly in respective products (like HAL in jets and helicopters, BDL in missiles, MDL in submarines or MDNL in composites), which is one of the reasons as to why these companies' profits are also relatively higher than others. Looking at the recently created seven entities out of 42 Ordnance Factories, one can see that all eight entities have shown a cumulative production value of INR 12,734 crore in FY 2020-21. Entities engaged in the production of small and land-based arms (Advanced Weapons and Equipment Limited), artillery (Armored Vehicles Nigam Limited), ammunition (Munition India Limited) are likely to get listed before the remaining entities as they evolve.

One may see competition between and partnership with private companies like Godrej and BDL (for missiles), L&T competing with MDL (submarines) or AVML (artillery), Tata Advanced Systems Limited, Adani Defence and Aerospace, Mahindra, Tata Motors, Ashok Leyland and others with their respective DPSU counterparts. Some of the large government and private companies may also either

partner with or take over smaller entities under MSME and startup categories, while industry-academia partnerships may not be confined to government institutes like IIT and IIM or universities, it has already spilled over to more than 600 different academic and research institutions.

To sum it all, Indian MSIC is witnessing a phase of churn, whose outcomes in both qualitative and quantitative terms will be seen in the next few years. What appears hazy is primarily because too many things are happening at too many places with a vibrant yet scattered ecosystem. Broad directions are toward government de-control, but specific directions could evolve with time. All this would not have been possible without a resolute political leadership with a clear vision toward 'Atmanirbharta' (Self-reliant) in defence.

The author is Editor, Defence and Security Review. Views are personal.

BRIEF: No.2

More than Meets the Eyes

INDIA'S TRADE AGREEMENT WITH UAE IS A STRATEGIC STEP FORWARD

On February 18, 2022, India signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with UAE. It came after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan attended the India-UAE Virtual Summit. "I believe that the India-UAE CEPA signed today will be a game-changer in our economic ties," PM Modi tweeted after the Summit. CEPA was signed between Indian Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and UAE Minister of Economy Abdulla bin Touq Al Marr in a function held in New Delhi on the same day. Minister Goyal also termed the Agreement a 'win-win' for both countries.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE de facto ruler Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan

Talks on CEPA between the two countries had started in September 2021, and the agreement was signed in less than six months. This is India's first trade pact in the whole Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The agreement will be effective from May 2022 and allow more than 90 per cent of India's exports duty-free access to the Emirates. The CEPA is likely to benefit about US\$26 billion worth of Indian products that are currently subjected to 5% import duty by the UAE, which is India's third-biggest trading partner behind the US and China. While crude and refined petroleum, gold and jewellery are top export items for UAE, India exports more than 1,100 products, including petroleum, edibles, machinery, textiles, electronics, organic and inorganic products. Both countries have projected a target of over USD 100 billion in merchandise trade by 2030.

CEPA between the two countries assumes strategic significance for a few reasons. First, it will energize quite a few economic sectors in India that have been under pressure from the pandemic and restrictive trade regimes. For example, the south Indian town of Thrissur, a major textile export hub, will be one of the biggest beneficiaries of CEPA, while stagnated poultry and animal product sectors would be able to export after bans due to bird flu are over. Interestingly, India's textile exports will now have a definitive edge over those of Pakistan, the other major textile exporter to UAE. Second, as India becomes a major manufacturing hub for a few strategic sectors like semiconductors, hydrogen energy, electric vehicles, and infra equipment, UAE could benefit in terms of imports and generate considerable revenues by investing in these sectors. With India initiating comprehensive economic reforms and ensuring prospective investors to do business with India, the pact will generate interests within the UAE investment community for investments in major sectors.

Third, a strategically important symbolism was attached to a long-standing demand of expatriate Indians in UAE when Prime Minister Modi laid the foundation of the first Hindu temple in 2018. The UAE gave the land for the temple in 2015 during Prime Minister Modi's first official visit to UAE in 2015. Members of the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) project claim that the temple will stand firm for a thousand years. This is the first Hindu temple in the whole Middle East region.

Fourth, a new trend of strategic significance was noted when a UAE-based rifle manufacturer, Caracal, competed against global giants and bid to supply 93,000 carbines to the Indian Army in 2020. This was symbolic of deeper military-industrial cooperation between the two countries. As India opens up its private sector further, offloads state in state-owned defence companies and allows much-needed investment in the military, scientific and industrial sector, UAE could be considered not only a mere investor but, more importantly, an industrial partner. India and UAE had signed a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2017. They hold annual defence dialogues. The UAE has been a critical part of the Indian Ocean Region dialogue. Both countries take part in military exercises with each other, and there have been several Military chiefs' visits to each others' capitals. It must be noted here that UAE was the first

country to promptly offer the mobile anti-drone system for PM Modi's security at the Republic Day parade in 2020.

India-UAE bilateral relations have not only evolved with time but have taken a decisive next step forward in recent times. If CEPA reflects the depth of economic and civilian side of cooperation, real-time intelligence sharing, deeper military collaboration, sincerity shown by UAE in the deportation of over 100 fugitives to India and participation of UAE firms in Indian strategic sectors are evidence of model bilateral relations that both countries nurture and cherish. This can only happen when both countries have a trust surplus, not a deficit. It is not for nothing that the Indian Prime Minister's tweet after the India-UAE virtual summit contained the term 'game changer'. The term was carefully inserted to show India's willingness to take the relations to greater heights.

The author is Editor, DSR. Views are personal.

DSR NEWS DIGEST

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FEBRUARY 1: 'BUDGET 2022: ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT IN DEFENCE! GOVT ANNOUNCES SOPS FOR THE DOMESTIC DEFENCE COMPANIES'

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her budget speech in the Parliament, highlighted technologies including geospatial systems, drones, space economy, artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors and its ecosystem, clean mobility systems, pharmaceuticals and genomics. In her speech, the finance minister said a large portion of the defence allocation has been set aside to procure new military equipment and weapons from the domestic industry. This will further push the government's focus on Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence. She announced 68 per cent of the capital procurement budget to be earmarked for the domestic industry in the current financial year. ([Financial Express](#))

FEBRUARY 4: 'INDIA FACES COLLUSIVE GREY ZONE ACTIVITIES SHORT OF CONFLICT', SAYS ARMY CHIEF MM NARAVANE

India will continue to face collusive 'grey zone' activities that will remain short of a full-scale conflict. The armed forces are preparing for future wars, the 'trailers' of which are already being witnessed, Army Chief MM Naravane has said. Speaking on the contours of future warfare, he referred to China amassing troops on the Ladakh border amidst the pandemic in 2020 to make the point that there could be a diversity of security threats in the future, including non-contact zone. "Our adversaries shall continue with their efforts, to achieve strategic aims, short of conflict, by use of grey zone activities, in the political, military and economic domains, and do so in a collusive manner," General Naravane said at a seminar organized by the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi. ([Economics Times](#))



FEBRUARY 1: 'SECRETARY-GENERAL OF OMAN'S DEFENCE MINISTRY CALLS RAJNATH SINGH.'

Oman's secretary-general of defence Mohammad bin Nasser bin Ali Al-Zabbi met defence minister Rajnath Singh and discussed ways to boost bilateral strategic ties. The meeting came a day after the two sides agreed to examine areas of mutual interest in forging joint ventures to enhance defence industry cooperation. The Indian defence ministry said Singh and Al-Zabbi discussed strengthening defence cooperation between the two countries. Al-Zabbi also briefed Singh on the outcome of the 11th India-Oman Joint Military Cooperation Committee Meeting (JMCC) in Delhi on January 30 2022. The JMCC meeting was co-chaired by defence secretary Ajay Kumar and the visiting official. ([The Times of India](#); [ANI](#))

FEBRUARY 10: 'INDIA OBJECTS TO UNSG ISIS REPORT'S OMISSION OF CLOSE LINKS BETWEEN PROSCRIBED TERROR GROUPS LIKE LET & JEM'

India has expressed dismay at the failure of the UN Secretary General's report on ISIS to take note of the close links between proscribed terrorist groups such as Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad despite New Delhi repeatedly flagging these concerns. The '14th report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIS to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat' notes that the security landscape in Afghanistan changed dramatically on August 15, 2021, following a Taliban military campaign that took control in the country, including Kabul. ([The Print](#))

FEBRUARY 12: 'INDIA FACES "VERY SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES", ESPECIALLY FROM CHINA, SAYS WHITE HOUSE AS IT RELEASES INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY.'

India is beset with significant geopolitical challenges, particularly from China and its behaviour on the Line of Actual Control, the White House has said while releasing its Indo-Pacific Strategic Report. Released on Friday, the strategic report is President Joe Biden-led administration's first region-specific report. It outlines the president's vision to firmly anchor the

United States' position in the Indo-Pacific, strengthen the region and support India's rise and regional leadership in the process. "We will continue to build a strategic partnership in which the United States and India work together and through regional groupings to promote stability in South Asia; collaborate in new domains such as health, space, and cyberspace; deepen our economic and technology cooperation; and contribute to a free and open Indo-Pacific," the White House said. ([Hindustan Times](#))



FEBRUARY 14: 'INDIA, MALDIVES HOLD DIALOGUE TO EXPAND DEFENCE COOPERATION.'

Indian Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar held very productive talks with the top military brass of the Maldives to further bolster bilateral defence and security cooperation amid concerns over China's increasing footprint in the Indian Ocean. The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region. The bilateral defence and security ties have been upward in the last few years. "Delighted to be in the Maldives for the 3rd Defence Cooperation Dialogue. Had very productive discussions," Kumar tweeted on February 14 2022, a day after the talks in Male. In November 2021, India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka held a two-day maritime operation in the Indian Ocean, signalling a resolve to jointly keep the region safe and secure, including for international trade. ([NDTV/ PTI](#), [Twitter](#))

FEBRUARY 15: 'RUSSIA SAYS IT WILL NOT BID FOR INDIAN NAVY'S NEW SUBMARINE PLAN, OFFERS UPGRADED KILO-CLASS.'

Russia has said that it will not participate in the Indian Navy's ongoing procurement plan for new submarines, confirming that the Indian government has been formally notified of the decision. The Rs 43,000 crore plan to acquire six new submarines under Project 75I has also hit delays early in the process, with other foreign contenders and Indian partners seeking additional time to formulate their proposals. The Russian side has offered India upgraded Kilo-class submarines - the type that forms the bulk of the current conventional fleet - but has decided to withdraw from the contest citing technical reasons. "The Russian side has previously confirmed its interest in participation in this programme and suggested a platform based on the design of Project 677E submarine Amur-1650. However, after receiving and studying the RFP finalizing terms and conditions of the tender, the Russian side has decided not to participate in the tender for technical reasons," a Rosoboronexport spokesperson told the ET Bureau. ([Economic Times](#))

FEBRUARY 16: 'INDIA AND THE PHILIPPINES TO WORK TOWARDS MARITIME SECURITY, INDO-PACIFIC AND DEEPER DEFENCE.'

India and the Philippines have decided to deepen cooperation in maritime security, combating terrorism, military training and capacity building. Besides meeting with his counterpart Teodoro L Locsin Jr., Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Dr S Jaishankar, external affairs minister, met with other ministers. The focus of the meetings was on further strengthening cooperation in various sectors like defence, finance and agriculture since both India and the Philippines are dealing with China over maritime and territorial issues. ([Financial Express](#))

FEBRUARY 23 : 'PLAN TO BUY PREDATOR DRONES PUT ON HOLD.'

India was planning to acquire 30 Predator armed drones for use across services at the cost of at least US\$ 3 billion from US-based General Atomics. However, it has put its plan on hold because of its focus on indigenous development and manufacturing and the prohibitive cost involved. Media sources say that the Pentagon has been informed of the decision. On February 9, the Indian government had banned the import of drones acquisition of unmanned aerial vehicles. However, this ban is not applicable to security forces as essential unmanned items can be exempted from the restrictions. Such exemptions require special and specific clearances. "As of now, the Predator deal is off," said a top South Block official who asked not to be named. ([Hindustan Times](#))

FEBRUARY 23 : INDIAN NAVY RECEIVES 12TH P-8I AIRCRAFT FROM BOEING

On February 23 2022, Boeing delivered the 12th P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft to India. This is the fourth of the four additional aircraft delivered under the options contract signed by the Ministry of Defence in 2016. Only the US operates more P-8Is than India. "Customer centricity, commitment to the modernization and mission-readiness of India's defence forces are key values to our partnership with India," said Surendra Ahuja, managing director, Boeing Defence India. "With this delivery of the P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, we continue to nurture this partnership and are fully committed to working closely with India's defence forces to deliver the right value and capabilities to meet their operational needs," Ahuja added. The P-8I is an integral part of the Indian Navy's fleet and has surpassed 35,000 flight hours since it was inducted in 2013. ([Mint](#))

FEBRUARY 24: 'BOTH RAFALE SQUADRONS FOR PAK AND CHINA FRONT READY, 35 OF 36 FIGHTER JETS DELIVERED.'

The two squadrons of Rafale fighter jets are fully functional, with 35 of the 36 aircraft delivered to the Indian Air Force from France. After Ambala, the first home for the Rafale jets, now Hasimara in West Bengal, is fully equipped to operate with the Rafales. The two squadrons with 18 jets each at Ambala and Hasimara have been planned for operations against Pakistan on the western front and China in the eastern sector. ([India Today](#))



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About SSPC

The Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict (SSPC) is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan research organization based in New Delhi, dedicated to conduct rigorous and comprehensive research, and work towards disseminating information through commentaries and analyses on a broad spectrum of issues relating to peace, conflict and human development. SSPC has been registered under the Societies Registration Act (XXI) of 1860. The SSPC came into being as a platform to exchange ideas, to undertake quality research, and to ensure a fruitful dialogue.

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