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This road is bad news for India

The China-Pakistan corridor has geopolitical ramifications

Beijing has stepped up its arguments in favour of its Belt-Road Initiative in the run up to its global conference on the transcontinental infrastructure programme in mid-May. Chinese officials sought to address Indian concerns about the flagship project of the BRI, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), arguing it would not affect the territorial status of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir — after all, there is an existing China-built Karakoram-Kunlun Road going through that region since the 1960s. Beijing's view on Kashmir, they have claimed, has remained unchanged for decades. The BRI is portrayed as a giant Chinese contribution to global economic integration that would help boost growth and even help keep a check on extremism. Beijing's representatives have also noted that over 40 countries have signed up for the BRI. The subtext is that India's continued resistance is futile and self-defeating.

New Delhi is right to remain wary. China's actions on the ground indicate a far less benign ambition. The China-Pakistan corridor has increasingly become about providing funds to the Pakistan military — to the point Pakistani industry has complained it is receiving no contracts. In Sri Lanka, China has not only built a number of economically unviable ports and roads, it has also left Colombo with \$8 billion in Chinese debt at onerous rates of interest. Beijing's use of economic blockades or boycotts against Mongolia recently and the Philippines and Japan earlier are warnings about what could follow from signing up for an infrastructure web centred on China. Beijing has been tying its Kashmir policy ever closer to the position taken by Islamabad — consider the stapled visa crisis of 2009, the ban on Indian generals of the Northern Command visiting China and the support at the UN for terrorist Masood Azhar.

All of this makes it difficult for India to accept the underlying Chinese claim that the BRI is an economic project with no geopolitical connotations. Under the BRI, all roads would lead to Beijing. Inevitably, Chinese power will flow along the supply chains and logistical paths that it will create and control.

Running before learning to walk

AAP is unravelling, and the party's top leadership is responsible for this

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal may have managed to keep the party together on Wednesday by striking a compromise with dissident leader Kumar Vishwas but his problems are far from over. It would not be wrong to say the party is unravelling and voters are tired of its shenanigans. In other words, the party has squandered the huge mandate they got in 2014. To make matters worse, it has a very strong BJP snapping at its heels. After their impressive victory in the Delhi municipal elections, the BJP is now determined to win Delhi in the 2020 assembly elections. Here is what BJP president Amit Shah said on Tuesday: The party's final destination was not civic bodies but the Delhi government. Urging party workers to unite and prepare for the next 'goal', he said, this success will lay the foundation for elections in 2020.

There are several reasons for this AAP debacle but the two main ones are: The party tried to run before learning to walk; and instead of focusing on governance, it continued to stick to its agitation-mode politics. While there is some truth in the fact that the Centre has been creating roadblocks — the AAP government in Delhi should have viewed it as a professional/political hazard. But instead of taking these challenges in their stride, the AAP team went on for a confrontational approach. Moreover, it made its Punjab assembly gambit a do-or-die issue, taking its eyes off Delhi.

The party's dismal performance in the MCD elections only allowed the discordant voices to emerge stronger. The party was expected to restructure itself after its electoral losses. But did nothing. Whether AAP agrees or not, there is stasis in the party and it has to reinvent itself if it wants to stabilise and expand its footprint in the future.

India must shape a new world order

The world is at an inflexion point. Our democracy and pluralism can help it face the challenges

SHYAM SARAN

We are currently at one of those rare inflexion points in history when an old and familiar order is passing but the emerging order is both fluid and uncertain. And yet it is this very fluidity which offers opportunities to countries like India to carve out an active role in shaping the new architecture of global governance.

The international landscape is becoming chaotic and unpredictable but this is a passing phase. Sooner or later, whether peacefully or violently, a more stable world order will be born, with a new guardian or set of guardians to uphold and maintain it. This could be a multipolar order with major powers, both old and new, putting in place an altered set of norms and rules of the game, anchored in new or modified institutions. Or, there could be a 21st century hegemon which could use its overwhelming economic and military power to construct a new international order, which others will have to acquiesce in, by choice or by compulsion. This was so with the U.S. in the post World War-II

period, until its predominance began to be steadily eroded in recent decades.

As we look ahead, there are three possible scenarios which could emerge. One is that China will continue to expand its economic and military capabilities, becoming the most powerful country in history. Some analysts are already conceding that role to China but I think this is premature. The Chinese economy is slowing down and it remains a brittle and self-centred polity. The second scenario is more realistic, that of a US-China (G-2) dyarchy, with a tacit acceptance of respective spheres of influence, but also zones of contestation. But such a dyarchy is likely to be unstable with one or the other power seeking untested dominance.

The third scenario is of a multipolar system, similar to the European led world order of states with comparable power and with rules of the game broadly agreed upon. This was created by the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and kept the peace for almost a hundred years till the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The current shifting international landscape lends itself more appropriately to a 21st century version of that multipolar world order and this suits India's interest.

Our country is still in the phase of accumulating economic and military power and would not wish to have our room for manoeuvre severely narrowed by either the emergence of a new hegemon or a dyarchy. India



• The United Nations Headquarters building, New York SHUTTERSTOCK

should try and shape a multipolar order with the support of other major powers, which is likely to be more stable and more conducive to maintaining peace and security and, importantly, mobilising collaborative responses to tackle contemporary and emerging challenges such as global warming, pandemics, cyber crime, drug trafficking and international terrorism. These, by their very nature are cross-cutting and not amenable to national or even regional solutions. A hegemonic order can constrain other states; it will rarely be able to promote collaborative action, which can be effective only if based on consultation and consent.

The US as a hegemonic power, presided over a world order which had been in the making over several centuries under pro-

longed Western dominance. The US was a legate of Western dominance not its progenitor, though it did expand and extend that dominance. For any aspiring hegemon, there is no such legacy to build upon, though China may claim a history of pre-eminence in Asia, which is more imagined than real.

Thus China cannot just step into the space hitherto occupied by the US. It is only a cluster of major powers, China included, which could together occupy that space and impart a degree of stability and coherence to the evolving international situation. India has the opportunity to play a key role in building an effective, enduring and rule-based order by mobilising other major existing and emerging powers all of whom would prefer a multipolar order in preference to a hegemonic or G-2 system which consigns them to secondary status. Such a multipolar order would also be preferable to powers in relative decline since it would still enable them to retain residual influence rather than be compelled to submit to a latter day hegemon.

We are living in an intensely globalised and inter-connected world where inter-dependency is the dominant trend. This demands a cosmopolitan temper, an instinctive embrace of plurality and a relatively democratic governance structure, enabling collaborative responses. India possesses all the necessary attributes to lead the way in shaping such a new order. Indian diplomacy should rise to this challenge and grasp a historic opportunity. Let us shape events rather than be shaped by them.

Shyam Saran is a former foreign secretary. The views expressed are personal.

GROWTH PANGS



• While governments still have the primary responsibility to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, it cannot be met by them alone HT

Reinventing the wheel, the Niti Aayog way

India is a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals. Thus it does not need another 15-year growth road map

NISHA AGRAWAL

I read with bewilderment a recent report in HT that the Niti Aayog has held a meeting of its governing council where vice-chairman Arvind Panagariya presented a 15-year vision statement. The plan, the report said, seeks to transform India into a "prosperous, highly educated, healthy, secure, corruption-free, energy-abundant, environmentally clean and globally influential nation" by 2031-32.

I was surprised to read this because India already has a 15-year development plan. On September 25, 2015, 193 countries including India signed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals (2000-15). This long-term plan is good enough to help the country meet its development goals.

So why do we need another vision statement? Wouldn't it be better to focus on implementing the SDGs instead? To counter criticisms against the MDGs that they were not developed in a participatory way and so not owned by any country, the SDGs were prepared after unprecedented consultations with the participating nations.

In India, the Planning Commission—the precursor to the Aayog—held extensive consultations with all stakeholders.

Thanks to such similar consultations in all countries, the SDGs have a broader vision of

what constitutes "good development" than the MDGs. Some of the interesting features of the SDGs are: Instead of only talking about girls' education (as the MDGs did), Goal 5 of the SDGs has a much more ambitious goal on gender equality. It talks about ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women, and ensuring women's leadership in decision making in political, economic and public life. There is also a goal to reduce inequality within and among countries (Goal 10) since we have seen an explosive increase in the inequality of income and wealth in the last 15 years. This was missing in the MDGs, which focused only on poverty reduction and failed to see a connection between the rising inequality and the slow progress on poverty reduction in the world.

There are two other ways in which the SDGs are novel. First, they are universal and apply to all 193 countries. It is now recognised that all countries — not just the developing nations — are facing development challenges. Second, it is recognised that all sectors — governments, civil society, and the private sector — will need to start working together to tackle these ambitious goals (Goal 17 on partnerships). While governments still have the primary responsibility, they cannot be achieved by them alone. It is worrying, therefore, to see India developing yet another 15-year vision instead of urgently getting down to implementing the SDGs. If a new vision statement is necessary, then India must make sure that it is aligned with the SDGs and also that it is designed in a participatory manner as the SDGs were.

Nisha Agrawal is CEO, Oxfam India. The views expressed are personal.

No consistent strategy on acting against Pakistan

After the beheading of two soldiers, the Centre must weigh all military and diplomatic options

HARINDER BAWEJA

For the third time in seven months, India finds itself holding the mutilated bodies of its soldiers. Each of the three instances in which soldiers have suffered the worst form of death came after the surgical strikes on September 29 last year, when the Narendra Modi government decided to take political ownership of the stealth operation into Pakistani territory.

What now? Is another strike the way forward for a country that is baying for blood? As Modi and his team weigh the response, they must think through their tactical and strategic options. After the cross border raids in September, the government, through the Director General Military Operations, had claimed to have delivered a devastating blow to the terror infrastructure. "The operations were basically focused to ensure that these terrorists do not succeed in their design of infiltration and carrying out destruction and endangering the lives of citizens of our country... During these counter terrorist operations, significant casualties have been caused to the terrorists and those trying to support them..." the DGMO had said.

An increase in infiltration and the spike in attacks — including the fidayeen strike at an Army camp in Kupwara last week — have endorsed the point that the surgical strikes have drastically altered the rules of the game. The Modi government — perceived to be one capable of a muscular response — will be looking at several options, including the military and the diplomatic.

All of these have been adopted by successive governments, including by the Congress-led UPA. Both, the UPA and the NDA have also tried to cajole the neighbour. After the beheading in January 2013, when a soldier was beheaded, Manmohan Singh — in favour of the dialogue route with Pakistan — had said, "It cannot be business as usual." Sushma Swaraj, then in the Opposition had demanded ten Pakistani heads to avenge the beheading of an Indian jawan.

Inconsistency has been the hallmark of

THE BALL IS NOW IN MODI'S COURT AND HE HAS TO DECIDE ON WHAT STEPS TO TAKE AGAINST A COUNTRY THAT HAS BEEN ACCORDED THE MOST FAVOURED NATION STATUS

India's Pakistan policy and the neighbour has exploited that, again and again. After the attack on India's Parliament in 2001, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee made it clear that the terror strike on its temple of democracy would not go unavenged. The army was moved to the border and it stayed in an eyeball-to-eyeball posture for months. Vajpayee also ordered Indian skies shut to all Pakistani planes. The Indian ambassador to Pakistan was recalled and the high commission considerably scaled down. Soon thereafter, Vajpayee worked towards a thaw. His successor, Manmohan Singh walked the same path after the attacks in Mumbai, when he agreed — through the infamous joint statement in Sharm-el-Sheikh — to delink talks and terror.

Modi too has alternated between the carrot and the stick. He surprised many by inviting his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif for his oath-taking ceremony in May 2014, only to cancel the bilateral dialogue a month later after Abdul Basit, Pakistan's high commissioner in India, held talks with Kashmiri separatists. Towards the end of 2015, Modi surprised his own cabinet and hardcore following when he made an unscheduled halt in Lahore — while on a trip back from Kabul — to wish Sharif on his birthday.

Many hailed Modi for a statesman-like move but that is not how the deep state in Pakistan interprets such gestures — irrespective of whether they were made by Vajpayee, Manmohan or Modi.

Monday's mutilation may have no connection to back-channel negotiator Sajjan Jindal's recent visit to Islamabad, but it is not beyond the realm of the possible that the Pakistani army — the sole custodian of foreign affairs, especially when it comes to India — may have used the battle action teams to send a message that it does not approve of the meeting between Jindal and Sharif.

The ball is now in Modi's court and he has to decide on what steps to take against a country that has been accorded the Most Favoured Nation status. He chose the surgical strike route after the killing of 19 soldiers in Uri but did not follow up on a move that stayed in the realm of the tactical.

The fact is that India lacks a coherent and consistent policy that the Pakistani army continues to take advantage of. India has often made the case that it needs to strengthen the hands of Pakistan's civilian leadership and this column is not arguing against it.

The limited point that bears reiteration is: Be consistent. For as Chinese general and philosopher Sun Tzu's put it: Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.

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innervoice

THE BLESSING OF THE LORD MAKES US RICH, AND HE ADDS NO SORROW WITH IT

Abhay Rawal

I have heard people saying that money is the most valuable thing in today's world. But I have also heard that money is not everything. These two opposing thoughts have left me perplexed about what is it in this world that is both important and permanent. I failed to find the answer, so decided to ask the expert — my father.

He told me this story: There was a middle-aged sage couple, who weren't blessed with a child. They decided to worship Lord

Shiva, after which, the Lord appeared and told them that there is no child in their destiny. But the couple longed for one, and after much imploring, Lord Shiva blessed them with a handsome baby boy. He, however, mentioned a caveat that since there was never a child written in their birth chart, the boy will die when he turns 18.

The couple raised the child with a lot of love but always had fear in their hearts. On his 18th birthday, the boy was heading towards the forest, where he met a great sage. He touched the feet of that great sage,

and received blessings of a long life in return. The sage was so spiritual and great, that even god wasn't able to turn his words down, and had to increase the life of the boy.

Now, I have the answer to my question, and that's also the moral of the story — Blessings. As the saying goes, 'the blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it'.

(Innervoice comprises contributions from our readers)

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