

EDITOR'S NOTE

As the Ukraine conflict extends beyond six months, the myth that wars of the future will be short and swift has been broken. With very large asymmetric military advantage over Ukraine, Russia was expected to overrun the country quickly. Clearly, that is not happening. Ukrainian resolve, backed by steady supply of Western arms and funds, has helped Ukraine in not only slowing or halting Russian advance, but has also inflicted significant damage and losses, including the flagship cruiser, *Moskva*. The war of attrition continues.

At the same time, Russia has occupied nearly 20 per cent of Ukrainian territory, albeit at cost of lives. Analysts are drawing initial lessons. The goals of the West, especially the US, are not clearly spelt out. Some are calling it strategic ambiguity. There seems to be no clear strategy to defeat Moscow. Just being a cheerleader for the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and overseeing loss of Ukrainian lives does not make eminent sense. Yes, the American long-range rockets did hit some important Russian targets.

Have the economic sanctions really made a dent in Russian economy or war-making capability remains doubtful. American sanctions on Iranian and Venezuelan oil and gas have kept oil prices high and benefited Russia. China and India had no choice but to buy more from Russia. Even Europe continues to do so. The forthcoming winter energy requirements of the European Union members will finally indicate impact.

Moscow has been vocal about its escalate-to-de-escalate strategy. It has tacitly threatened to use nuclear weapons to ward off possible intervention by the West. Other than the large numbers of dead, there

are nearly seven million recorded Ukrainian refugees across Europe as of end August. Could there be an end to the war? Can the West meet the Russians half-way? Would that mean partition of Ukraine? Will the original condition of not joining the NATO continue to apply to the left-over country? In a fit of bravado, Zelensky insists that Ukraine will not rest till the last inch of its territory is regained. Clearly, the last bullet has still to be fired, and only time will tell the end-state.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan was seen by many as its weakness. On that count, the USA has lost further stature in handling Ukraine. This could embolden China on Taiwan, and encourage Iran to take its own calls on nuclear processing. Ever since the all-powerful and aggressive President Xi Jinping of China usurped nearly 3 million sq. km in South China Sea, and pushed strategic footprint in Oceania and Central Asia, the West should have concentrated on taking on the real challenger and made small concessions to Russia and kept it in its fold.

In wars like this there are no clear winners and losers. The general feeling is that other than Ukraine, which will be the major loser, European nations would have to spend more on defence, and on energy, and therefore will all be losers. NATO will gain members. Of the new members, some will become front-line states and would have to build up armed forces. After the World War II, war clouds have moved closer to them. The American military industrial complex will be a winner with huge order books. Russia will gain territory but will lose economically in the long run, notwithstanding short-term gains to the value of Rouble and Russian foreign exchange reserves.

Another big event that saw fireworks was US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan and its aftermath. China was clearly irked by such a high-level visit to what China calls its renegade province and whose reunification is its highest national priority. The first such visit by a US House Speaker after 1997, was seen by China as unwarranted provocation. In the year of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) 20th Congress, President Xi Jinping could not be seen as weak. They responded by announcing a near blockade-like encirclement of

Taiwan by organising military drills and live-firing exercise at various zones around Taiwan, including in Taiwan's sovereign territorial waters, creating a Taiwan Straits crisis.

The fact that US President Joe Biden had publicly questioned the need and timing of the visit had also emboldened China. There were others in the US Administration who felt that such a visit will strengthen US's geostrategic image of being tough, and improve President Biden's otherwise low public rating. It was also a signal to the world that the US stands with democratic Taiwan. Clearly, the visit was much more than a short transit. Other than meeting the fiercely popular and nationalist Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, Pelosi visited the legislature, discussed economic cooperation, and met semiconductors manufacturers. Pelosi's reception and high visibility events were watched by the entire world. The Taiwanese military made air defence and high-security arrangements.

China responded with symbolic cyberattacks, and banned around a hundred Taiwanese food products. Live firing drills carried on between August 4 and 7 with missile and rockets over-flying Taiwanese territory. There were repeat air incursions in Taiwanese territorial waters. China also used extensive psychological warfare. Meanwhile, the US Navy moved its intelligence vessels and warships closer to the area for show of force. The symbolism and demonstrated anger fizzled out shortly after the visit.

The world now awaits the 20th National Congress of the CCP which will elect the 20th Central Committee. It will take place sometime in October-November 2022. The CCP reportedly has around 90 million members represented by 2,300 delegates. The provincial part organisations began electing delegates a year in advance. The Central Committee will approve the members of the most powerful Political Bureau and its Standing Committee. Xi Jinping is expected to be re-elected as the General Secretary. He may also be called the Chairman of the CCP, a title last used by Mao Zedong. Xi has been articulating his achievements in terms of poverty alleviation, ecological rejuvenation, strengthening national security, military modernisation, and integration of Hong Kong, a firm stand on

Taiwan, and China's strong stand in multilateral bodies. Xi has been forcefully pushing assertive dominance of the CCP, and coercing members to remain fully committed to the party's ideology.

The 14-point "Xi Jinping Thought" is meant to drive his personal cult. Essentially, it rides on and pushes CCP dominance over every activity, and promoting socialist core values and people-centric approach. Strengthen the national security gets high priority. The military must remain subservient to CCP. Reunification of Taiwan is high priority. Xi has been trying to promote Communist Party youth wings' role. Xi has also been ruthless when it came to purging potential rivals under the garb of anti-corruption drive, something reminiscent of Mao's Cultural Revolution.

Xi's re-election would mean continued assertive foreign policy. Meanwhile, there are others who are questioning Xi's performance, especially related to the very costly 'Zero-Covid' push, and also the economic slump that was caused because Xi wanted to rein in successful entrepreneurs who were not toeing the CCP line. Meanwhile, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has announced that he will retire this year, having already served two terms. This is a tacit hint to Xi Jinping to follow the two-term norm.

This issue of *Defence and Diplomacy* looks at many contemporary issues like aerospace priorities, energy dynamics, especially after the Ukraine conflict, and neighbourhood issues, among others. Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft have become very crucial for all air and surface battle management. NATO has used these extensively to support Ukraine against Russia in the ongoing conflict. Continental-sized countries need to have sizeable numbers. Similarly, Ukraine has successfully used Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAV) against surface targets like tanks and military vehicles. While India has energised its drone and UCAV production ecosystem, a lot more still needs to be done for acquisitions of larger platforms for the armed forces. Intelligence gathering is a continuous process both during peace and war. An author looks at India's intelligence set-up and what more needs to be done.

For long, China had maintained its nuclear deterrence with around 350 nuclear warheads. It retains a “No-First-Use” policy. However, many analysts felt that the arsenal was small considering the continental size, military strength and global ambitions of the country. China has now begun expanding and modernising its nuclear forces. This, combined with growing conventional strength, is being watched closely by the world. The conflict in Ukraine and sanctions on Russian oil and gas had created a global energy crisis. This, when combined with the US sanctions on Iran and Venezuela, complicated the situation, and the price skyrocketed, and had the world scrambling for alternative sourcing. India had to use its cards and connections with Russia and West Asian nations to secure its energy supplies. With the approaching winter, Europe may see some difficult days ahead. We have two authors looking at India’s West Asian oil sourcing dynamics and Indo-Russian energy dynamics.

A lot is being spoken about cryptocurrency but many find it difficult to understand what this new unfolding means for global trading. If this new form of financial transactions were to succeed, would it change the status quo and reduce the dominance of major currencies like Dollar and Euro? Will it then help evading sanctions, and in turn dilute deterrence? Meanwhile, as Pakistan continues to go through a severe financial crisis, it is hoping for bailouts from the IMF, friends in West Asia, and long-term friend and ally, China. Most are wary about putting their money in the black hole. If China does bail Pakistan out, it could extract its pound of flesh. It could mean concessions and intrusions into Pakistan’s security system. Greater usage of Pakistani ports, putting Chinese foot-soldiers to defend CPEC assets, or seeking airfields for use would all have security implications for India.

Finally, Anu Sharma looks at Gawdat Bahgat and Anoushiravan Ehteshami’s book, *Defending Iran*. Iran’s international isolation has made it exercise options of asymmetrical and irregular warfare using cyberspace. The book also looks at how Iran plans to deal with its two regional adversaries Israel and Saudi Arabia, and its relations with the US, China and Russia.

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