

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/CHIN-01-250314.html>

Gains for China, India in new cold war

By M K Bhadrakumar

3/25/2014

China and India need to meditate over zen and the art of responding to the Ukraine crisis. If they cherry-pick thoughtfully, they stand to gain significantly out of the rising tensions in the relations between the United States and Russia.

In terms of co-relation of forces - to use the jaded Marxist-Leninist concept - the international environment is becoming very promising. Much depends on how China and India choose to respond to the courtship that can be expected from the West and Russia in a foreseeable future and extract advantages.

President Vladimir Putin singled out China and India in his celebrated Kremlin speech last week to express Moscow's satisfaction over the stance they took over Crimea's historic accession to Russia. In carefully chosen words, Putin said, "We are grateful to the people of China, whose leadership sees the situation in all its historical and political integrity. We highly appreciate India's restraint and objectivity."

Quite obviously, there is a difference between gratitude and appreciation. There are strong signals that Russia would reciprocate during Putin's forthcoming visit to Moscow in May and sign the long-awaited trillion-dollar mega deal for the supply of Russian gas to China by showing flexibility on the vexed issue of pricing, which has been holding up negotiations for the past few years.

Reuters quoted Western analysts in Moscow assessing that Russia might relent on the four-year old Chinese request for supply of SU-35 fighter jets and generally agree to ease restrictions on Chinese investment in its strategic industries.

Unsurprisingly, China is much in demand. Its famous abstention in the UN Security Council vote on Crimea's referendum 11 days ago pleased Moscow to no end as the best outcome possible, while Washington forthwith claimed it saw in it Russia's total isolation in the UN. China has let both Russia and the US exploit its ambivalent stance.

Meanwhile, Michelle Obama's weeklong visit to China came handy for Beijing to spread petals of goodwill toward the US. President Xi Jinping has made the extraordinary claim of a personal friendship with Obama. The Obamas and Xis are getting along like a house on fire.

Meanwhile, the Ukraine crisis prompted Obama to extend his stay at The Hague for the nuclear security summit so for the bilateral with Xi on Monday.

To be sure, Obama is making a point to Moscow - although Putin is skipping the Hague summit. Russia's isolation is the running theme of Obama's meetings at The Hague, as the US national security advisor Susan Rice made clear in a media briefing in Washington.

But there could be more to the Obama-Xi meeting than symbolism. There is a palpable reduction in the tensions in the Asia-Pacific in the recent days - almost in direct proportion to the rising tensions in Eurasia. Obama is presiding over a US-Japan-South Korea trilateral at The Hague to reset the Asia-Pacific calculus.

Alongside, we are witness over the weekend to the incredible spectacle of Chinese and Japanese aircraft scouring the oceans around Perth, Australia, looking for the remains of the ill-fated Malaysian plane.

This works well for China. In a candid commentary on Saturday, Global Times took note that unlike Russia, which is a strong power, "it is not wise for China to fuel confrontations with the West."

The Global Times differentiated Beijing's existential predicaments from Moscow's challenges in ties with the West. The West considers Russia to be more of a nuisance - "trouble-maker" rather than a rival, whereas, China needs to be mindful that it is the West's main focus, because China has the "potential to grow stronger than the US." Suffice to say, China should keep a "sober mind about its strategic direction" since it is vulnerable today.

How the Obama-Xi meeting at The Hague pans out will be keenly watched not only in Moscow but also in Delhi.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that Russia's "oil czar" and Putin's close confidante, Igor Sechin, headed for Delhi on Monday. It's a Russian initiative. Moscow hopes to conclude a multi-billion

dollar deal to supply two nuclear reactors to India. It is in tearing hurry to do so amidst the strong possibility that Obama's next round of sanctions would include the energy sector.

Zen inspiration Obama's "smart" sanctions include blacklisting Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who promptly mocked Obama that he has no assets in America that Washington can freeze.

But then, Obama too may have a game plan, insofar as Rogozin is also the point person for Moscow's military-technical cooperation with India, which is Russia's number one buyer of weapons. These are early days, but the eagle's eyes seem to be training on the Russian-Indian "strategic and privileged" partnership.

On March 21, Obama authorized potential future sanctions on Russian industries, including financial services, energy, metals and mining, defense and engineering. A Russian military intervention in Ukraine can trigger the new round of sanctions.

The US military and intelligence officials have been quoted as saying there are now Russian troops virtually on all of Russia's borders with Ukraine and in some sectors have been reinforced with armor, attack airplanes and helicopters. Rice has said pointblank that there is a credibility problem when the Kremlin says Russia won't intervene militarily in the rest of Ukraine.

The Indians are wondering what Sechin has to offer. Will he convey Moscow's green signal for India to acquire assets in the upstream oil sector in Russia, something that India has been keenly seeking and Russia hedging so far?

Clearly, the urgency to diversify Russia's exports to the Asian markets prompts Putin to depute Sechin to Delhi as part of a regional tour to Japan, South Korea and Vietnam. Moscow takes seriously the possibility that Washington is bent on whittling down Russia's dominant presence as energy supplier in the European market.

What gives impetus for Russia to accommodate India as a major partner in the energy sector is also to ensure that it remains a stakeholder in the strategic partnership with Russia even under a new government in Delhi following the parliamentary poll in May and will not succumb to US pressures to comply with the West's sanctions regime.

India has an opaque record when balancing words and actions in similar situations. While it publicly maintained that it wouldn't comply with the US' sanctions against Iran, the plain truth is that in practice it did. Besides, India is also deepening and broadening its energy partnership with the US.

Also, the hard-nosed unsentimental pundits in Delhi cannot be persuaded easily that Russia's confrontation with the US opens a vista for restructuring the international order or the Bretton Woods system. They are not fired up by revolutionary sentiments, but would rather negotiate better terms for itself in the existing world order.

Thus, India is pressing for LNG supplies from the US, investment opportunities in the upstream shale gas sector in the US with a view to sourcing "fracking" technology and in the field of green

energy.

Simply put, Moscow would want to embrace India tightly so that Uncle Sam is kept at bay, but India would prefer to keep some space for its dealings with the US as well. This is where the rising US-Russia tensions can work to India's advantage - for, unlike in the Cold War era of the last century when India operated in a bipolar world and was stigmatized by the US as a "Soviet proxy", the new cold war, if there is one, will be unfolding in a multipolar setting with India is enjoying friendly relations with the US.

In sum, both China and India can expect some serious courtship by Russia. But neither has any desire for confrontation with the US. Nor are they going to be deflected from their set foreign-policy trajectory, which attaches the highest importance to expanding their relations with the US.

Neither country is going to allow Russia to figure as a factor in their respective relations with the US. Indeed, they aren't even sure that the Russia's elites, who until yesterday were incorrigibly sold out "Westernism", are even genuinely interested in a "pivot" to Asia - except in tactical terms for future bargaining effectively with the West at a future date.

Cherry-picking calls for dipping into the well of zen inspiration. The best picker is one who has a knack for spotting the ripe fruits. A complacent attitude is risky because appearances can be deceptive and the fruit may not be in good condition or ripe. Worse still, there is always the temptation to gather the low-hanging fruit whereas quality fruit could be found higher up in the tree.