

Wang Yi hurt India-China ties

By Srikanth Kondapalli

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China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi's unheralded visit to India on March 25, amidst the continuing stalemate in Russia's war on Ukraine and the continuing India-China stand-off in Ladakh, had raised many an eyebrow on the timing, motives, content and outcome of Wang's mission.

Firstly, China has been watching the unfolding situation in Ukraine, although its media is allowed to report only pro-Russia news. The two official Chinese news agencies have no reports on the Bucha massacre or any destruction by Russia. Official China is aware that the war is costing Russia heavily – the ban on banking transactions through SWIFT, the sanctions and the freezing of assets, Russia's ouster from the UNHRC, and so on. It has made China think of the costs it might have to bear if it invades Taiwan.

China is heavily dependent on countries that are part of NATO for its economic and technological rejuvenation. So, alarm bells are ringing in Beijing. Some Chinese commentators such as Hu Wei have suggested that China should distance itself from Russia; others have argued that Beijing must protect Moscow from further decline, given the ramifications that would have for China's own position in the global order. Any further decline of Russia or loss of political influence for Vladimir Putin would make China the next top target of the West.

Wang's mission in this context was to nudge India to take anti-western positions through "multipolarity" debates, while saving Beijing from becoming the focus of western sanctions. Given India's neutral position in the UN debates, Beijing thought it could make a truck with New Delhi, offering its magic weapon of a "united front". India clearly rejected the offer when External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar enumerated India's national interests and strategic autonomy in Parliament.

Though India abstained from the UNSC resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as in the UNHRC, New Delhi intended to approach Russia on the Ukraine matter directly, not in concert with China. Indeed, by meeting only the visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Prime Minister Narendra Modi signaled India's position clearly.

Secondly, China's refusal to disengage and de-escalate militarily, despite 15 rounds of Corps Commanders' meetings has depleted any residual goodwill in India for China. China's revisionist position of "meeting halfway", or consolidating its intrusions through infrastructure projects, were stoutly rejected by India. Jaishankar, in fact, spoke of the "abnormal" state of affairs in bilateral relations.

The all-round destruction of several cities of Ukraine has had a sobering effect on warmongers in Beijing on the unpredictable nature and outcomes of a modern war. China and India, which also have a large inventory of Soviet/Russian military equipment, deployed in the India-China border areas, are concerned about any military escalation. While Wang did not concede on the issue of troop/equipment de-escalation, the costs for China of military conflict with India are unnerving,

given the Covid upsurge in many places in China and the preparations for the crucial 20th Communist Party congress later this year in Beijing.

Thirdly, by raising the Kashmir issue during his visit to attend the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation meeting in Islamabad just before coming to India, Wang intended to test waters in Delhi. As with China's efforts to "discuss" Kashmir at the UN Security Council in 2019 and 2020, Wang's ill-advised statement caused not only his India visit to fail, but New Delhi can put the 'One China' policy on the block.

Fourthly, Wang's mission also included making sure that Modi attends the BRICS meeting in China later this year. With Putin attending the Beijing Winter Olympics, China's appetite for such public events has increased.

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India And The U.S. Navigate Their Differences

By Jeff M. Smith

Author is a Research Fellow at the Heritage Foundation.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in April hosted their Indian counterparts, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Defense Minister Rajnath Singh. The ministers met for the fourth edition of the 2+2 defense and foreign policy dialogue that began during the Trump administration.

The talks were preceded by a virtual meeting between President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the two countries celebrated 75 years of diplomatic relations. The dialogue was largely successful, if not entirely groundbreaking. What was achieved may have been less important than what was avoided: a diplomatic rupture over the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

At the 2+2, both sides offered lofty rhetoric about the health and future of India-US ties. "There's virtually no domain on which we are not cooperating with each other," Jaishankar declared. Austin called the relationship the "cornerstone of security in the Indo-Pacific." Singh signaled India's happiness with the numerous "foundational" military agreements signed in recent years, insisting the two sides would "double up capabilities across conventional and emerging defense domains." Readouts of the discussions noted the two militaries are operating "closely together across all domains" and would "jointly meet the challenges of this century."

Perhaps the most interesting takeaway from the meeting was a proposal to "explore possibilities of utilizing Indian shipyards for repair and maintenance of ships of the US Maritime Sealift Command to support mid-voyage repair of US Naval Ships." Beyond that, the dialogue produced a handful of modest but positive developments. These included an agreement to cooperate on space situational awareness as well as the launching of a new Defense Artificial Intelligence Dialogue. They also involved commitments to joint service engagements to support high-end combined operations; to the co-production of air-launched unmanned aerial vehicles; and to expanded joint cyber training and exercises.

India also announced that it would join Combined Maritime Forces Bahrain, a "multinational maritime partnership, which exists to uphold the Rules-Based International Order by countering illicit non-state actors on the high seas and promoting security, stability, and prosperity."

Arguably the most important outcome was the two sides' ability to navigate differences over Russia and the Ukraine crisis. India and the U.S. have never seen eye-to-eye on Russia, but Putin's invasion has brought their quiet disagreements to the forefront.

Some U.S. commentators cried foul when India voted repeatedly to abstain from criticizing Russia at the United Nations for its conduct in Ukraine. They called into question India's credentials as a democratic member of the Quad while it continued to import Russian oil and gas.

The U.S. government, however, has adopted a more flexible approach. It recognizes that most of India's legacy military hardware is of Russian origin. The Indian government believes it can ill afford to alienate its top defense supplier while its border dispute with China grows more violent and volatile. The U.S. government also recognizes that, in the subtle language of diplomacy, India's position has shifted from stoic neutrality to criticism of Russia's actions — without naming Moscow explicitly.

In a break from its early statements on the crisis, the Indian government is now denouncing violations of international law, sovereignty, and territorial integrity in Ukraine. New Delhi has also condemned the horrific killing of civilians in Bucha and, unusually for India, called for an international inquiry into the atrocity. "All these statements, without naming [Russia], are clearly aimed at indicating unhappiness towards what Russia has done," explained former Indian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Syed Akbaruddin. Modi has also spoken to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy twice. Modi is rumored to have signaled India's opposition to the war in direct conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Bucha killings in particular may have marked a turning point in Indian public opinion. With several Indian reporters in Ukraine broadcasting images of the horrors back home, the Indian press has engaged in unusually lively criticism of Russia's actions in Ukraine. Some have questioned Moscow's ability to remain a reliable supplier, with Russia's own military industrial base being drained by the Ukraine conflict. Others are increasingly unnerved by Russia's deepening embrace of China and Moscow's neutrality during recent flare-ups at the China-India border.

Arguably the only time Russia has notched a victory in Indian public opinion is when the U.S. government has been perceived as threatening or lecturing India over Ukraine. A trip to New Delhi by Deputy National Security Advisor Daleep Singh earlier this month ruffled feathers when he was quoted threatening "consequences" for any Indian attempts to evade U.S. sanctions while importing Russian energy.

This month, the White House sought to clear the air. When asked if, during a pre-meeting phone call, Biden had pressured Modi to reduce Russian oil imports, a White House spokeswoman noted Russian energy represents only 1%-2% of total Indian energy imports, adding: "They're not violating any sanctions by importing oil. It's a decision we made to stop importing oil. Different countries have their own calculation."

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Super Visible India

By Sanjay Sahay

Author is former Police Officer of Karnataka. Now he is Founder & Director, of TechConPro Pvt Ltd. Bengaluru

Sai Baba provided drinking water to the whole of Anantapur district a long time back. Dr. Kurien made the Amul and white revolution out of nowhere. Same goes for the Aravind Eye Care System, avoidable blindness was the scourge, it tackled effectively, revolutionized eyecare in India and made it a role model for the world. Propaganda and long arduous programs / projects do not go hand in hand. Nor will the super performer have the time like the social media creatures have.

They have realized the handicaps, understood the issue seven levels below what a normal person can see and worked it bottoms up. These are just examples of models of organic change, growth and development, which get deeply rooted in the local soil, society, economy and culture. Their minds were like X-rays on Indian ground reality and they spent a lifetime to turn it around.

Today the super visible India cannot be seen by anybody, the bureaucrats, police officers, educators, health administrators, politicians, elected representatives, political executives, the modern gurus, even the industry and philanthropists at times. First issues first, amongst the group mentioned above, can they tell us what Indian reality is hidden from them? Do they feel they can make a difference or are they there to exploit the pitiable ground conditions? Last but not the least is the media, which can't see anything that is happening on a day-to-day basis, impacting all of us, competing with Bollywood. Government runs through departments and programs / projects, how many of it gets reported for the ills they face. Pilferage has been the order of the day, what has been done about it? it has been years since Lokpal came into existence.

Talking of quality is blasphemy. Administration, media and the political executive cannot see these eye sores all around and complained about in the most heart-rending manner. Janata darbars for whom and for what? Encroachments are a new battle cry. Very difficult to find places without encroachments. Let any municipal corporation declare its encroachment-free areas. With the nature of official machinery and resources provided for, can encroachments happen on their own? No one comments on any one's knowledge of law, because in the huge plethora of laws, the only functional dictum is, show me the person or give me the situation and I will give you the legal provision to get away with the high handedness you intend to unleash.

What about the building bye-laws and its compliance? The normative reality is non-compliance. The design / drawing is just treated as a box in the checklist. Regularization? Who makes these rules for what? What has been done to the utilities in the urban centers of this country, even closed eyes can see. Are we wedded to urban chaos to sustain the flamboyant lifestyle of the groups being talked about. In the urban dungeon and beyond how things move are being debated in percentages all across India. The quality of public education for what price? And the final fate is the health chaos experienced across the country less than a year back, does not attract any culpability. Nobody is responsible for anything; they can certify each other. In the cobweb of criminality every spider is in. How do you stall your visible nemesis?

INDIA STILL REMAINS THE LAND OF RULERS RATHER THAN OF GOVERNANCE PROFESSIONALS, COMMITTED TO QUALITY DELIVERY.

China Planning a 'Go Big, Go Early' Strategy Against Taiwan

By John Grady

While it's unclear what lessons Chinese military planners are learning from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they learned to "go big and go early" from America's quick victory in the first Gulf War, a panel of defense analysts agreed Thursday.

It's a strategy the Chinese could use against Taiwan.

Bryan Clark, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, said if the Chinese don't win early on they'll see their cross-strait invasion become "very messy, very quickly." He added it would "become a slog," as the Russian drive on Kyiv became. Later, Clark added he didn't expect China to have the same "nuts and bolts failures" that the Russians have experienced in logistics and command in Ukraine.

Matthew Costlow, a senior analyst at the National Institute for Public Policy, said a key to the defense of Taiwan and deterring Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific is denying Beijing's "hopes of ... an easy asymmetric victory." Critical to doing that is Guam, a U.S. territory, and America's allies and partners.

China has seen how European allies and partners have rallied to Ukraine's support in sending military and humanitarian aid and "the international backlash" imposed on the Kremlin following the invasion. The backlash included harsher and more targeted sanctions against Russian financial and political elites since Moscow launched the unprovoked attack.

"Guam reduces the tyranny of distance" as a logistics and operational hub for the United States in the vast Indo-Pacific. It raises "the prospects of a long-drawn out conflict" for China if Beijing opts for military action in the region.

Patty-Jane Geller, a fellow at the Heritage Foundation, said "It's certainly worth the investment" to beef up Guam's defenses and to address the island's missile defense requirements against long-range attack. "China is already building more missiles" to get its way in the Indo-Pacific, regardless of whether the U.S. builds up defenses on Guam or even if Washington pulls back from the U.S. territory to a further removed operational and logistics hub.

Guam hosts a major naval support facility and Anderson Air Force Base, which is capable of handling U.S. long-range bombers.

The defense of Guam is actually "related to homeland missile defense," Costlow said. Clark said an attack on the island should be taken in the same way as an attack on Hawaii or the West Coast would be in Washington and Beijing needs to understand that, particularly if it is threatening the use of nuclear weapons.

This was a message Adm. Phil Davidson stressed during his tenure as the top commander in the Indo-Pacific and has continued advocating since he retired. Adm. John Aquilino, the current commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, has also emphasized that a missile defense system for Guam is his top unfunded priority.

"We have our citizens to defend" on Guam, Geller said, adding the U.S. public in North America must understand that. This emphasis on "our citizens" sends a clear signal to allies that the region is important to the United States.

There are limits to the missile defense of Guam, Hawaii and North America, the panel agreed.

Costlow added he totally rejects the idea that "if there is one leaker the missile defense has failed."

Clark and the others said the reality of cruise, hypersonic or ballistic missile attacks or missiles launched from bombers point out the need to disperse operations on the island and also distributing forces. Other facilities across the region – like Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan, the Northern Mariana Islands and northern Australia – in a long campaign with China and the defense of Taiwan take on new importance. He added part of a campaign is to show potential adversaries and allies what options are available to defend national interests – hypersonic missiles, directed energy, forward presence and training with forces in places like Taiwan.

There is "a range of active and passive defenses we can take," Costlow said. "You can make Guam more resilient" and have other bases for operations when the island is down.

Courtesy: The Council for Strategic Affairs

Pakistan's National Security Policy: Why this will be just another eyewash and not make any reversal of policy direction

By Rana Banerji

Author is a former special secretary, Cabinet Secretariat.

Though the National Security Policy claims to have consulted more than '120 experts' and '500 specialists', the National Assembly and Senate were bypassed

Pakistan's 'first ever' National Security Policy (NSP), covering a five-year period from 2022 to 2026, was approved by the Imran Khan cabinet on 28 December 2021 and a 'sanitised' version of it was made public on 14 January 2022.

The 48-page document contains eight sections. Section I outlines the policy formulation process. Section II takes up conceptual elements of Pakistan's national security framework. Six thematic sections follow, listing Pakistan's desired objectives. Section III examines how 'National Cohesion' is to be achieved through the preservation of ideology, ensuring unity and stability, and making public service responsive to citizens' needs. Section IV focuses on the economy, suggesting that 'Economic Future' could be 'secured' through prioritising trade ties, energy, education and human resources. Section V deals with Defence, Territorial Integrity, Space and cyber security. Section VI, on 'Internal Security', examines challenges of terrorism, violent sub-nationalisms, extremism and sectarianism. Section VII dwells on 'Foreign Policy in a Changing World'. Finally, population and migration, health, climate and water, food and gender security are dealt with in Section VIII, titled 'Human Security'.

Ostensibly authored by experts of the National Security Division over a seven-year period, its release enables National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf to earn his spurs before his military mentors. Its timing may yet help Prime Minister Imran Khan to counter the perception of a rupture in civil-military relations.

The Bajwa connection

Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa first flagged economic development as the core security issue at the Islamabad Security Dialogue (ISD) in March 2021. He had observed then, 'that the contemporary concept of national security is not only about protecting a country from internal and external threats' and was 'not solely a function of armed forces anymore'. 'A nation at peace and a region in harmony' were 'essential prerequisites for attainment of national security'.

Bajwa grudgingly acknowledged that, 'despite being one of the most impoverished regions of the world, we end up spending a lot of money on our defence, at the expense of human development'. Yet the NSP does not tell us how the 'three challenges' identified, those of 'external imbalance, vertical inequalities, and horizontal inequalities', are to be reduced. Only a massive transfer of wealth from the rich rentier classes, including both Pakistan's feudals and Generals could stem rising economic and political discontent. The NSP does not promise either.

The potential of 'stable Indo-Pak relations', 'a key to unlock the untapped potential of South and Central Asia by ensuring connectivity between East and West Asia', was expectedly qualified by Bajwa, to have forever remained hostage to the 'Kashmir dispute', without whose resolution through peaceful means, sub-continental rapprochement will always remain susceptible to derailment. Bajwa, nevertheless, believed it was 'time to bury the past and move forward'. It wasn't clear then, as now, if the collegiate army leadership was on board.

Relations with India

Though wishing to improve relations with India, the NSP talks of ‘India’s hegemonistic designs’, ‘the rise of Hindutva driven politics’ and ‘political exploitation of a policy of belligerence towards Pakistan by India’s leadership’, which ‘has led to the threat of military adventurism and non-contact warfare’. This is not just Moeed Yusuf wanting to prove more loyal than the King but a reiteration of unchanged, age-old mindsets of animosity which have characterised policymaking in Pakistan. There is no evidence in the NSP that any firewalls are being created to prevent a backlash from vested stakeholders in institutions, groups and classes that have benefited from appropriating assets of state over seventy years plus, riding on insecurities against the ‘implacable enemy’ in the East.

Jammu and Kashmir

On Kashmir, standard postulations are repeated. ‘A just and peaceful resolution’ of the ‘dispute’ ‘remains a vital national security interest’, wherein, ‘India’s illegal and unilateral actions of August 2019’ are seen to have been ‘rejected by the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK)’.

There is no mention whatsoever, of either Gen Pervez Musharraf’s ‘Four-point Peace Plan’, or the progress achieved between 2003 and 2007, in de-freezing the logjam under the Track II ‘Lambah-Tariq Aziz’ process.

Nuclear

On nuclear policy, the NSP treads familiar ground, holding that ‘Pakistan’s nuclear capability deters war through full-spectrum deterrence within the precincts of credible minimum nuclear deterrence’. The obsession with ‘India’s nuclear triad, open-ended statements on nuclear policy, and investments in destabilising technologies’ to ‘disturb the strategic balance in the region’ continues.

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Nation is Indebted to:

Dr Kirti Bharti

Crusader against child marriage



Kriti Bharti (born August 19, 1987) is an Indian rehabilitation psychologist and children's rights activist. Bharti made headlines as the first annular of child marriage in India. She is the founder and director of Saarthi Trust, a non-profit organization that primarily rescues and ensures the recovery and welfare of child marriage victims.

Bharti has a Doctorate in Psychology at the Jai Narain Vyas University in Jodhpur

At college, Bharti joined many NGOs and started counselling simultaneously. Her first case was a rape victim who was just 9 years old. Bharti thought that a temporary relief via counselling is ultimately pointless. The encounter prompted her to pursue.

Through the NGOs, Bharti was able to work with several street children that suffered from child labour, poverty and child marriage. After seven months, she noticed that a pressing issue among the homeless children is child marriage. Child marriage, although considered illegal in India, remained prevalent, especially in rural areas. Bharti's home state, Rajasthan, was considered the world's epicentre of child marriage.

As Bharti worked with NGOs, she noticed how they were just spreading awareness; while she believed it is essential, it is merely treating the problem at the surface level. Thus, in 2011, driven by her experience with children in NGOs, she established Saarthi Trust. Saarthi Trust works on grassroots level and ensures the rehabilitation and welfare of child marriage victims after rescue. The organization provides education, vocational training and employment opportunities to ensure the independence of the victims thereafter.

In 2012, Bharti made headlines on her first case, Laxmi Sargara. She was the first woman in India to have her child marriage nullified. Since then, Bharti and her team have been working on personally visiting villages and schools to discuss the detrimental effects of child marriage and to teach women empowerment. The organization has a helpline for underage brides and grooms to report their case. As victims reach out, Bharti's team obtains proof of the marriage and then talks to the family of both the bride and bridegroom, and then to the elders of the community in an attempt to convince them. If it fails, Bharti's team seeks legal help and takes the case to the court.

Throughout years of activism, Bharti has faced countless death and rape threats.

Saarthi Trust has rehabilitated more than 6,000 children and 5,500 women. Since it was established in 2011, Bharti's team has annulled more than 150 child marriages and halted more than 1,400 from happening.

Yes, a sensitive person who understands the unexplainable trauma of social evils can fight against that and not only fights but wins. Dr Kirti Bharti is one such crusader amongst us.

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