

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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No Option Other Than Peace

Peace is indispensable in today's world, and since, the international politics is inclining towards power play and the use of military dominance, the slogans of peace must be further strengthened. For the developing and under-developed countries peace is a prerequisite for other sorts of development. Without sustainable peace, thinking of prosperity is nothing more than a figment of one's imagination. With peace, a society would be on the track of a healthy evolution and it would be able to concentrate on many other issues that are hurdle in the way to bliss and contentment.

Unfortunately, no peace has been for ever and fortunately, no war has lasted long. Wars have always devastated human civilizations, killed millions of human beings, brought miseries and pains and yet they have not been rejected as unnecessary and this fact is really very painful.

It is difficult to believe that knowing the horrors of wars, human beings have always considered them necessary and almost all the nations in the world are really ready for wars. There are many important requirements that are neglected in the society and most of the energy and efforts are utilized to make a nation ready for launching war and strong militarily. It is weird to note that there are many countries on the face of earth that would not utilize the resources of the nation for improving the standard of the living of the people but would spend them magnanimously on acquiring modern weaponry. In fact, human beings are preparing for their own destruction and extinction consciously.

Just consider the amount and the characteristics of modern weaponry; they have the tendency to raze human beings from the surface of the earth completely. The magnitude of weapons of mass destruction at the disposal of world nations can even destroy the entire earth several times.

Unluckily, some of the human beings are of the view that peace can only be achieved through wars and therefore, wars are necessary in human societies. This is the biggest misconception human beings have ever had. War does not and cannot bring peace; it in its nature is destructive. Even if war brings peace that is only after the entire human civilization is erased. Would a peace, in a world without human beings, be required at all?

Most of the wars have been possible because the nations have been very much interested in dominating each other and gaining power as power has enabled them to play major role in international politics and power game. In the meanwhile, they have forgotten the basic philosophy of the development of politics and states. Politics is really a game of power but the same power can be used to bring peace and tranquility within the world. Moreover, if all the political achievements of human beings are not able to bring them peace, what is the purpose of all those achievements? If they are not able to use their tendency to love each other what is the use of their sensitive feelings? In words of Mahatma Gandhi, one of the greatest propagators of peace and harmony, "The day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know true peace."

One of the basic reasons of wars has been the tendency to subjugate others and try to revenge them for any perceived misdeed. And the series of retaliations have mostly formed an unbreakable chain of recurring circle and the wars have devoured several generations. This fact is true both in collective and in individual lives. Nations and individuals who have kept on retaliating have only been able to achieve great loss, nothing else. Mahatma Gandhi had rightly quoted, "An eye for an eye would only make the whole world blind." That is how human beings in today's society behave. They behave as if they are blind towards all the ugly manifestations of bloody wars and to all the miseries; therefore, they are making themselves ready for more and more wars, more seriously than ever before.

For our country Afghanistan, peace stands paramount as the country is suffering from war, instability and resultantly from poverty and misery. The efforts to restore lasting peace in the country should be further strengthened and the national, regional and international stakeholders should come together so as to establish lasting peace. The current urge and the calls for peace must be cashed and the Taliban must also understand that they have no option to win the ongoing war through violence. They neither have the capacity, nor the people in Afghanistan are ready to support them if they continue their current attitude. Therefore, it is vital that they should lay their arms and promote peace and tranquility in the country. Neighboring countries in this regard must also play their part and should understand that ultimately it is peace that would be in the benefit of everyone.



Merkel's House Divided

By Sławomir Sierakowski

Divisions within Germany's ruling coalition over refugees have started to jeopardize Chancellor Angela Merkel's control of the government. To put down a rebellion launched by her own interior minister, Horst Seehofer of the Bavaria-based Christian Social Union (CSU), Merkel now must secure agreements with other European Union member states to bring order to Europe's asylum system. And that, in turn, requires German concessions on eurozone reforms.

Germany has always been the foremost beneficiary of the EU's incoherent economic status quo. In the absence of a joint fiscal policy, the common currency shared by Europe's poorer south and its more productive north has the effect of artificially boosting German exports. It is little wonder, then, that Merkel-led governments have consistently opposed eurozone reforms, including those proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron last year.

But now, cyclical economic developments and Merkel's own domestic vulnerability are forcing a change. Not long ago, the German position in eurozone-reform negotiations was to offer the bare minimum: redesigning the European Stability Mechanism to turn it into something resembling a European Monetary Fund. Yet during a recent summit with Macron at the German chancellor's residence in Meseberg, Merkel agreed to far more ambitious reforms than anyone expected. Crucially, she and Macron announced plans for a common eurozone budget, to be funded by a financial transaction tax and EU disbursements.

Merkel's concession represents a significant departure from what she was willing to accept only a few weeks ago: namely, a program to extend jointly financed loans to troubled eurozone member states. Now that she has agreed to a common budget, existing EU treaties will have to be amended.

But that will not be acceptable to the Netherlands, which leads the Hanseatic League (comprising the Scandinavian and Baltic countries), or the Visegrád Group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia). In fact, the Meseberg agreement will be rejected by Germany itself: the electoral base of Merkel's Christian Democratic Union opposes a eurozone budget, as do CSU voters, not to mention the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP).

Merkel knows the European and German political scene better than anyone. Why, then, has she made the decision to meet Macron halfway? The answer is that she now needs something from him and the southern eurozone countries that have become transit points for migrants and refugees. At home, Merkel has come under fire from Seehofer, who is demanding that the government send back all refugees who have already been registered in another EU country.

Seehofer's hardline position on refugees partly reflects the challenge his party faces from the AfD in Bavaria's elections this fall. But Seehofer is not just playing domestic politics. He has also been undercutting Merkel's foreign policy, by throwing his support behind other

populist and nationalist leaders such as Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, and even Russian President Vladimir Putin. As a result, Bavaria is now part of an anti-refugee crescent that runs through the Visegrád Group, Austria, and Italy.

Merkel has suggested that she would dismiss Seehofer were he to issue a ministerial directive for returning refugees. Her own approach is to push for a pan-European refugee agreement at an EU summit later this month. And last week, she met with the leaders of Italy, Greece, France, Austria, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands, whose help she needs to restrict the movement of asylum seekers within the EU. In exchange, Greece no doubt wants debt relief; Italy wants looser EU fiscal rules and a change to the European Central Bank's mandate to include bond purchases; and Bulgaria wants a fast track to eurozone accession.

Merkel's sudden diplomatic flexibility suggests that Seehofer's pressure campaign is working. But the political fallout remains to be seen. As matters stand, the CSU could simply accept economic concessions in the eurozone negotiations, though that might hurt it in the upcoming elections. Alternatively, it could break its eternal partnership with the CDU, now that its public support has reached 18%, second only to the CDU's 22%, according to a recent INSA poll. If the CSU rebels, the CDU can put forward its own candidates in Bavaria. But this is hardly a viable option, as a civil war between the two allied parties would sink them both.

There is a third possibility, though. Merkel could be toppled and replaced by someone further to the right on the refugee issue – a German version of Kurz – such as the CSU's Jens Spahn, who is currently serving as the federal health minister. Merkel recognizes this possibility – which, as it stands, appears to be the most likely scenario for Germany – but she has little choice but to draw out the game in the hope that some other solution will emerge.

Given the risks Merkel faces, Macron cannot expect her to stick her neck out too much. Moreover, he himself will have to tread carefully, because Merkel is one of his only allies within the EU. In addition to the Visegrád countries, the Baltic states, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands are all more or less aligned against him on issues relating to eurozone reform. And now Euroskeptical populists are in charge in both Austria and Italy.

Even if a suitable candidate could be found to replace Merkel, that person would not be able to match her in standing up to the likes of Putin and US President Donald Trump. A Germany without Merkel at the helm would be a boon to populists everywhere. If Seehofer's tactics really do result in Merkel's removal from power and her replacement by someone like Kurz, it will be clear that Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński, Poland's populist de facto leader, are not some kind of Eastern European anomaly, and that both presage what awaits the EU.

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Iran's Chabahar Port is Where Asian and Middle Eastern Rivalries Collide

By James M. Dorsey

Iran's Indian-back port of Chabahar, inaugurated months before the United States re-imposed sanctions on the Islamic republic, is where Asia and the Middle East's multiple political conflicts and commercial rivalries collide.

Chabahar was destined to become a player in geopolitical and economic manoeuvring between China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Central Asian states even without the re-imposition of sanctions.

The sanctions have, however, significantly enhanced its importance as Iran struggles to offset the likely punishing impact of US efforts to force the Islamic republic to alter its foreign and defense policy and/or achieve a change of regime.

Iran sees the port together with the Indian-backed Chabahar Free Trade Zone, that hopes to host a steel mill and a petrochemical complex, as the motor of development of the Iranian section of the Makran coast. Iran's province of Sistan and Balochistan shares the coast line with the Pakistani province of Balochistan, home to the Chinese-backed rival port of Gwadar.

Saudi Arabia sees the Pakistani region as a launching pad of a potential effort by the kingdom and/or the United States to destabilizing the Islamic republic by stirring unrest among its ethnic minorities, including the Baluch. Saudi Arabia has put the building blocks in place for possible covert action but has to date given no indication that it intends to act on proposals to support irredentist action.

A study written by Mohammed Hassan Husseinbor, an Iranian of Baloch origin, and published by the International Institute for Iranian Studies, formerly known as the Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies, a Saudi government-backed think tank, argued that Chabahar posed "a direct threat to the Arab Gulf states" that called for "immediate counter measures."

Mr. Husseinbor said Chabahar would enable Iran to increase market share in India for its oil exports at the expense of Saudi Arabia, raise foreign investment in the Islamic republic, increase Iranian government revenues, and allow Iran to project power in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

Saudi Arabia, months before the US re-imposition of sanctions, already sought to thwart development of Chabahar by stopping South Korea's POSCO Engineering & Construction from moving ahead with a \$1.6 billion agreement with Iranian steelmaker Pars Kohan Diar Parsian Steel (PKP) to build a steel mill in Chabahar. Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund has a 38 percent stake in POSCO.

"This project mandatorily requires the decision of the board of directors. However, as relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia rapidly grew worse after a severance of diplomatic ties last year, outside directors in the board meeting are having negative stances on Iran projects, especially those requiring investment and JVC (joint venture company) establishment," POSCO said in a letter to PKP. POSCO said it had difficulty "convincing and reaching consent on the unfavourable opinion from the outside directors."

The POSCO letter signalled that Chabahar's success would depend on

the political will of governments with India and Iran in the lead rather than on any hope to attract private sector investment.

India was earlier this month forced to drop a demand that the winner of a bid to manage the Chabahar port pay an upfront US\$8.52 million premium.

"We were charging a premium from the successful bidder to meet our preliminary expenses. But the shortlisted bidders said that the project is of strategic importance and is not commercially viable," said an Indian official.

Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj insisted last month that her country would not bow to US pressure to adhere to the Trump administration's sanctions. "India follows only UN sanctions, and not unilateral sanctions by any country," Ms. Swaraj said.

Beyond the port's economic importance for Iran, it will also likely allow the Islamic republic to increase its influence in Afghanistan at a time that the United States and Saudi Arabia are stepping up economic cooperation with Kabul in a bid to isolate both Iran and the Taliban.

For its part, Afghanistan sees the port as a way to reduce its transport dependence on Pakistan with which it has strained relations.

Despite the US cloud hanging over it, Chabahar's potential significance goes beyond whether it will contribute to the Iranian effort.

India hopes that its US\$500 million investment in the port will offer it a gateway to Afghanistan and land-locked Central Asia that constitutes an alternative to infrastructure related to China's Belt and Road initiative, including the \$50 billion plus China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and an anti-dote to Chinese investment in Indian Ocean ports. If geopolitics did not already amount to a full plate, Chabahar is likely, together with a host of ports in Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Oman and Qatar, to challenge the longstanding dominance in the Indian Ocean of Dubai's Jebel Ali port.

Commercial competition between ports has been reinforced by the Saudi-Iranian battle for regional hegemony as well as the Gulf spat between Qatar and a Saudi-United Arab Emirates-led alliance that a year ago imposed an economic and diplomatic boycott on the Gulf state and the war in Yemen.

As a result, commercial, military and geopolitical drivers for port investment in the region have blurred and expanded the multiples rivalries into the Horn of Africa with the UAE and others, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar jockeying for position in Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen and Djibouti.

Said NATO Defence College analyst Eleonora Ardemagni: "The political rift in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) weakens economic integration prospects and as a consequence cooperation among commercial ports. The Qatari crisis opened a new chapter in intra-GCC relations marking the emergence of latent nationalism in the Arab Gulf region: the rising geopolitics of ports is going to further unveil this trend."

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