

The War With Iran Will Not Be One-Sided. Should World War III break out, it would differ from World Wars I and II

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A conflict with Iran will not be one-sided. For one, Russia under Mr Vladimir Putin, aligned with China and Iran, with silent approval from nations like India and Germany that seek energy security by peaceful means, may resist US-led Western hegemony more forcefully. Both Moscow and Beijing feel remorse at permitting the shoddy politics in the UN and handing over Libya and Muammar Gaddafi to the oil-hungry Nato powers.

Already amidst escalating uncertainties, China, Russia, Iran, India, Brazil, Venezuela and other countries have moved to do bilateral trade in their own currencies and avoid using the dollar as the reserve currency.

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Should a Third World War break out, it would differ from the First and Second World Wars where rival colonial factions fought for hegemony. This time, the winners of the two Wars are on the rampage; they have lost the propaganda war as their naked greed has been exposed in the public arena and their opponents are not colonial raiders.

As America escalates tension with Iran, the world should stand by Tehran and the UN must cease to behave like the handmaiden of the West.

The Government of India has moved with commendable alacrity to clarify that it has not asked oil firms to reduce crude imports from Tehran. Iran remains this country's second largest crude oil supplier despite India twice voting that the International Atomic Energy Commission refer Iran's nuclear issue to the US Security Council in February 2006 and November 2009. Both times India could have abstained; the mindless quest for a strategic partnership with America nearly compromised our national interest.

The need for caution has doubled. As Washington, DC escalates tension with Tehran, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta admitted on CBS's Face the Nation programme on January 8 that despite the rhetoric, America is aware that Iran is not developing nuclear weapons but is only pursuing "a nuclear capability".

Yet the Obama Administration last December enacted a law under which the US can impose sanctions on any financial institution dealing with Iran's central bank, its main clearing

house for oil payments. This could jeopardise India's oil payment system which is currently routed through Turkey's Halkbank; a delegation to Tehran is expected to take up the matter.

The Washington-Tehran face-off is causing unease in world capitals as the Iranian resistance is likely to be superior to what America and its allies faced in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan. In all these theatres, the Western allies bludgeoned the states with brute military force, but had no strategy to hold the ground thereafter. Hence America ran from Iraq and is trying to quit Afghanistan; the Libya story has yet to unfold.

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Already amidst escalating uncertainties, China, Russia, Iran, India, Brazil, Venezuela and other countries have moved to do bilateral trade in their own currencies and avoid using the dollar as the reserve currency. Indeed, Saddam Hussein's decision not to sell oil in dollars and Muammar Gaddafi's quest for the Arab gold dinar led to their deaths and the ruination of their countries. Now Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also seeks an alternate currency to the dollar, causing Washington to strive towards a showdown with Tehran.

Nevertheless, the US will have to come to terms with the fact that its currency — once the world's reserve currency — is losing traction in international trade. China and Japan now trade in bilateral currencies and Russia is making similar deals with major trading partners. In fact, one reason why the US attacked the Euro in 2009 was to nix its emergence as the new international reserve currency. But this has failed to restore the dollar's hegemony.

Once he becomes Russia's President, Mr Putin is likely to resist the US on Iran and also address the issue of Nato's encirclement of Russia with ballistic missile installations. He will almost certainly intensify energy politics via pipeline diplomacy with Nato members such as Germany, France and Italy to woo them away from the US.

That leaves America with only formidable military power, which is not enough without commensurate economic might. The US could fund the fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and other places because China and other trade surplus nations invested in America's treasury debt. They will now shift, cutting the US adrift at a time when it needs to throttle the emerging Russia-China-Iran axis.

The core issue is that as the need for energy security increases the mutual interdependence of countries, the US seeks monopolistic control over the raw materials of others. Confrontation and conflict are built into this 19th century style buccaneering ideal; as a result, war clouds loom over Iran.

We now have two contending worldviews. One buys what it desires by negotiating the price; the other grabs (or tries to) what it desires regardless of the price it (and others) may have to pay. Should a Third World War break out, it would differ from the First and Second World Wars where rival colonial factions fought for hegemony. This time, the winners of the two Wars are on the rampage; they have lost the propaganda war as their naked greed has been exposed in the public arena and their opponents are not colonial raiders.

The Strait of Hormuz that links the Persian Gulf with the Indian Ocean has emerged as the axis mundi of international politics. Twenty per cent of the world's daily energy supply (17 million barrels of oil) passes through this waterway which is the sole maritime link between oil-producing Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the rest of the world. Last month, Tehran threatened to block the strait in anger at Washington's new sanctions against Iranian oil exports. A lengthy closure could cause a 50 per cent spurt in oil prices and wreck the global economy.

Attitudes have hardened with the killing of Iranian nuclear scientists with chilling regularity over the past two years. In January 2010, a remote-controlled bomb attached to a motorcycle killed Masoud Ali Moham-madi, 50; he taught neutron physics at Tehran University. In November 2010, two separate car bombs exploded on the same day — one killed nuclear scientist Majid Shahriar and injured his wife; the other wounded nuclear scientist Fereidoun Abbasi and his wife.

In July 2011, Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation member Darioush Rezaei, 35, was shot dead and his wife injured by two gunmen firing from motorcycles outside their daughter's kindergarten; he was a specialist in neutron transport which lies at the core of nuclear chain reactions in reactors. On January 11, Professor Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan, 32, was killed when a magnetic bomb attached to his car by motorcycle-borne person went off.

Iran is justly enraged and will fight for its honour and sovereignty. Recently, it conducted naval exercises in the Arabian Sea near the Strait of Hormuz and sternly warned American aircraft carrier, USS John C Stennis, which had just left the Gulf, not to return. The world cannot afford the ruination that an Iran war could wreak upon us all. De-escalation of the crisis is imperative. For a start, the major capitals must ensure that the UN ceases to behave like a handmaiden of Western colonial interests.

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