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Nuclear Free Asia will be a Giant Step for Common Security and Peaceful Rise

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My central argument is that conflicts where ever they are, are interconnected from local to regional and so on. Their impacts are diverse and inter linked. Therefore our responses as peace movements/ activists should reveal these interconnectedness and make sure the movements for peace remain connected to the multitude other social, climate and progressive movements.

My second argument is that root cause matters. So to deconstruct nuclear policy we need to see the militarism written all over it. My third point is that just as trade followed flag (military conquests) as colonial policy, currently there is indication that flag will follow trade i.e. physical wars can follow trade wars. I expand on these points with the case of Asia and specifically India-China-Pakistan triangular militarisation/nuclear weaponisation.

The China-India –Pakistan triangle is amongst the militarized zones in the international system as well as a dangerous site of possible nuclear confrontation in Asia. These three countries are deeply weaponised with nuclear and atomic weapons and missiles that promise mutually assured destruction, have large battle hardened armies and most dangerous have realist, competitive and militarised nationalism that play out in both domestic, national, regional and international policies. India is at the base of this triangulation where the three have unresolved territorial claims. India prepares for a ‘two front war’, China prepares for all out battle with the US, and aims for global hegemony since the G-2 arrangement is not acceptable to the US. Pakistan prepares for strategic leverage with China, Afghanistan and others. Besides this triangle, there are competing and conflicting concentric circles that can either (a) exacerbate this confrontation, (b) drag allies into their own conflicts. (c) These concentric circles can also assist in curbing ‘local’ conflicts and use of nuclear weapons as we explain below.

Concentric Weaponised Alliances in Asian Geo Politics

Asian countries like others seek multiple economic, trade and security arrangements. Pakistan and China have strategic and “all weather” ties. Pakistan has a deep hand in Afghanistan’s internal conflicts, strategic partnership with the US and has acted as a bridge between the US and China. China has strategic maritime interests and claims over islands in the South China Seas and faces containment strategies by the US and NATO. India has strategic alliance with Russia and ongoing engagement with the five eyes (Australia, Canada, UK USA New Zealand- intelligence command) and now developing Quad arrangements (USA, Australia, Japan and India). The point is that any confrontation can get various alliance countries involved. The example of the prolonged conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria Libya recently has shown this. So how will these triangles play out in the unfolding New Cold War?

New Phase of the Cold War

In all phases of the bipolar Cold War, Asia has been a traditional theatre of hot war, even as Realists concentrated on Eurocentric analysis. Colonial, imperialist and racist thought and practice played out as colonial wars; Anglo-Russian wars in Afghanistan, US wars over the Far East and South East Asia, and so on. In the first Cold War, (one war two systems) the Bretton Woods system (IMF, World Bank) and Security Council gave the US veto powers over world economy and international politics. Soviet Union and China worked on gaining zones of influence and proxy wars in parts of Southeast Asia and other parts of the Global South competing with US imperialist interests. As the former colonised subjects transitioned to sovereign states the ambition of coloniality/neo-imperialism continued. This coincided with rising nuclearisation and expansion of nuclear weapons states (NWS) but also some treaties to limit and match nuclear strength (SALT, START, INF, etc). Sadly no such treaty is even in process amongst Asian nuclear weapons states.

In the second phase of the Cold War, China got engaged with US financial systems and the Euro entered the currency diversification race. Tigers of South East Asia and emerging countries (BRICS) initiated financial arrangements. The process of neoliberal globalisation assisted local elites from the global South become entrenched in the Bretton Woods club and military industrial complexes of the developed world. New forms of regionalism (ASEAN, SAARC,

NAFTA, EU) and plurilateral institutions like BRICS, SCO etc. were statist, focussed on trade and enabling finance capital, but unable to ensure peace, security, justice and international law based secure nuclear free world system.

The 'New Cold war' in post Covid alliance system clearly points to a deepening cold war between China and the US. The reason is (1) The planned industrialisation of China does not follow the path of US financialisation- though they can upset US financial markets and their cheap goods have assisted the US and others in curbing inflation. (2)The US and its allies fear the loss of their hegemony /monopoly to manipulate world economy and the veto power given them by the Bretton Woods institutions. (3) Technological control is giving access to China, Russia and others to US citizens directly, bypassing governments. (4) Start of de-dollarization. (Chenoy, 2020) Russia, Iran and others are already drawn into trade, finance and currency wars with the US. (5) China's increasing maritime control in the Pacific especially the South China Seas is at odds with US and its allies, who contest this. (6) The BRI brings Europe to the heart of Eurasian politics, which China seeks to influence and are structuring alliances with Russia and oil pipelines in this realm. (7) New alliance systems are in the making, for example the China and Iran Investment and Security Pact, working on strategic rail road linking Tehran Baghdad Damascus. (China will station 5000 troops in Iran) As China focuses on BRI, Iran is important to reach the Mediterranean Sea via Iraq and Syria. Any war therefore can involve entire alliance structures, can escalate from local to regional to international.

In case of physical war, (a) Russia and many others have already said they would like to stay neutral, despite the strategic embrace with China. (b) China is gathering several allies in S.E. Asia, but few would like to be drawn into war. (c) India, the most recent experience has shown, is willing to take a step back from Chinese territorial claims and direct clashes and has been in favour of a moral victory of not retaliating at the time of Covid-19. (Vanaik, 2020) These seem positive steps, but there are no institutional mechanisms that can ensure peace as the UN has been weakened and militarism is on the rise. (d) Concern that renewal of New START between Russia and US about to expire in February, and renewal has not been initiated. (d) The European Union is divided on NATO pushing for an increased contribution by EU on defence expenditures. Germany seems to want a détente with Russia and has moved on trade pacts with them, but Poland with its right wing leadership support

NATO and increase in defence spending. EU would be divided on aggression with China. In sum, there are forces for conflict and those against it, in the current scenario the trade and finance wars will aggravate as will militarism.

Defence Expenditure

As Covid rages and austerity measures characterise many economies, dependence on World Bank loans, problems of debt repayments, shortage of infrastructure for health and social expenditures decline or stagnate and remain far below the required basic necessities defence expenditures and imports from the West and arms exporting countries continue and purchases have barely been impacted, in almost all of West and Asia. World military expenditures in 2019 increased by 3.6% from earlier year. SIPRI- showed that both India and China increased and modernised their nuclear arsenal in 2019 over the earlier year, and that China and Pakistan together had more nuclear war heads compared to India's 150 war heads. China is developing its triad-based on land and sea based missiles and nuclear capable aircraft (Economic Times, 16 January 2020). China's 2020 defence budget of US \$ 179 billion (three times that of India). And 2nd highest defence spending after US in world. India is planning similar upgrades. China and even India believe that they need the capability to counter US nuclear threats.

The SIPRI Yearbook 2020 shows that Indian arms exports have decreased by 32% since 2015, but the country remains the second biggest weapons buyer, just behind Saudi Arabia (SIPRI 2020); Pakistan is the fifth largest importer; China is the 12 largest importer and fifth largest exporter of weapons. In the midst of Covid-19 pandemic and India- China standoff the Indian Government approved the procurement of 21 Mig-29 and 12 Sukhoi aircraft fighters from Russia. (For details on this standoff see Vanaik, 2020) So militarization has continued as usual during this pandemic, in the midst of climate change and existential threats.

The contrast with basics facilities for citizens like health and education in each of these countries is stark, to give just one example: Kashmir has 01 ventilaters for every 71,00 people, 01 doctors for every 3,900 people, 01 soldier for every 09 people. (Strategic Research Institute). Such comparisons are common to most of the Global South, but the collapse of health systems before the Pandemic reveal this as a global phenomenon.

Deterrence, Defence, Threat, Accident et al.

Reams have been written especially by activists on the high possibility of use, the untruth of deterrence, the high risk of accident, the complete dishonesty and genocidal intent of producing, maintaining and advocating such weapons of mass destruction. We focus on 1. The ideology that compels nuclearization/militarisation and how close it is to the common citizen. 2. The possibility of the 'New Cold War' and its likelihood of Asia as epicentre. 3. Strategies that the peace movement can use for de-nuclearisation, de-militarization and linking with climate, social justice and the other social movements.

1. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the medical crises and the clear unpreparedness of countries to protect and provide relief to their citizens. This crisis has been badly handled by most countries but more so in countries with right wing populist and authoritarian regimes, where this was dealt with in a militarised way. The discourse of mixed metaphors- where most statements by the top leadership on the medical crises were seen as 'war'. See for example: President Xi asked PLA to "Scale up battle preparedness" for a "complex" war on Chinese territorial issues from Ladakh to Taiwan. (Outlook Magazine, 2020). On the same day, he spoke to G-20 to prepare for "an all out global war" against the Covid-19 pandemic. Xi has continuously said that China's success in handling Covid-19 is linked to the success in military reforms pointing to his control as chair of the Central Military Commission-CMC. So "this epidemic prevention and control struggle is a practical test for national defence and military reform." (Hindustan Times, 2020)

In Pakistan, the military has increased its grip on the Imran Khan government since people believe the government has failed to take correct stand to support people during the pandemic. Dozens of new appointments to government positions were given to serving or retired army men, ceding little space for civilians and civil oriented policy. The spending priorities if anything defence spending increases every year and is non transparent, despite the IMF request. Analysts believe that if 'hidden' or non declared military expenditures were to be calculated then Pakistan's defence budget in 2019 could be \$11 Billion. When debt servicing is 41%. The Pakistani parliamentarians and civil authorities do not have much say in military budgets and planning as the

military continues to make independent assessments on threat perceptions and planning. As a consequence the military continues to corner large part of the country's resources and nationalist/militarist rhetoric is the mainstay of dominant discourse. (Siddiqa, 2020)

The Indian PM and the Home minister in almost every reference on the Pandemic have mixed metaphors of health crises as a war. Amit Shah: "we will win both wars Covid and LAC"; PM Continuous use of Corona as invisible enemy and medical workers as soldiers without uniform. (Economic Times, 2020)

Such militarist discourse 1. Diverts attention from lack of health facilities to the idea of threat and enemy, in fact in early days the spread of the virus was blamed on an Islamic congregation. 2. Justifies use of emergency/ exceptional methods which have been used like the lockdown-or lockout of millions of migrant workers. 3. Justifies 'sacrifice' for nation followed by 'obedience' to a leader 4. Is used to place emergency and draconic legislation to curb citizens – in India many activists and journalists were arrested after they had participated against laws that changed citizenship rights in India just before the Covid crises broke out. 4. Takes away from the dignity of care workers and militarises the medical professionals. "sacrifice' warriors—who have to die if necessary. And 'honours' citizens as 'collateral damage' during war, thus dispensing with citizens right to life as they are 'sacrificed' in war. Such militarism does not augur well for domestic and basic needs of countries, goes against rights, supports increases in surveillance and authoritarianism.

Resistance and Change

With Covid 19 there is a setback to recession and livelihood collapse for millions. Especially in developing countries. For Governments, Covid-19 has been an opportunity for authoritarianism. Surveillance increased and MICs continue with business as usual. Revenues have collapsed and increase in nationalisms and imperialism. Remedies have to be global and need for a change in global architecture. UN Sec General was correct in arguing that "Against the background of rising ethno-nationalism, populism, authoritarianism and pushback of human rights in some countries, the crises can provide repressive measures for purposes unrelated to the pandemic" and he also called for a global cease fire so all countries can focus on battling on corona pandemic.

There is an alternate history and movements from workers, students, peasants in West and East. Latest being occupy to black lives matter to Climate rebellion and anti CAA anti draconian laws in India, Philippines etc. Now New Green Deal and Progressives International. But need to link with taking it to the core of the military industrial complexes and anti-nuclear abolition deals. Militaries have historically destroyed land and continue 'colonizing the earth' (Vandana Shiva) and communities world over. Securitization needs to stop while simultaneously mind set of widening peace-justice- human security humanitarian peace.

The peace and social movements need to continue to focus on mutually ensured protection and human security instead of mutually assured destruction; make efforts towards pushing states towards an international law for prohibiting use of nuclear and chemical weapons. Further new initiatives like the Green New Deal already need to expand to include white for peace, pink for feminism, red for workers and so on.

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