

Western pressure on Syria

Contributed by kgajendra singh
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"In our system, each individual is presumed innocent and entitled to a fair trial," said George W. Bush when asked about 5 count indictment of Lewis "Scooter" Libby, US Vice- President's top aide.

On 31 October, Russia with Chinese support, thwarted attempts by Anglo-Saxons joined by France, former colonial master of Syria and Lebanon, to place Damascus under UN sanctions based on an inconclusive and suspect report on the murder of Rafiq Hariri, ex-Prime Minister of Lebanon. The Security Council resolution only demands that Syria cooperate with an international inquiry into Hariri killing.

The 15-0 unanimous vote came after last-minute negotiations in which the resolution's sponsors - the US, France and Britain – had to delete a threat of sanctions against Syria from their draft and replace it with a warning of possible "further action" if Damascus failed to comply. Russia and China had made it clear that economic sanctions would invite a veto.

US led Western leadership and corporate and government media hounds have already tried and pronounced the top Damascus leadership almost guilty, based on the testimony of a known embezzler, according to 22 October Hamburg 's news magazine "Der Spiegel", by UN appointed investigator Detlev Mehlis whose impartiality and integrity are also suspect.

During his January visit to Moscow Syrian President Bashar Assad had signed an agreement to purchase surface-to-air missiles despite protests from Israel and USA. He said, "these are weapons for air defense, meant to prevent aircraft from intruding in our airspace." To mark the historic Syrian visit, Russia announced that it would write off 73% of US\$ 13.4 billion in debt owed by Syria from the days of the USSR. Russian President Vladimir Putin said this created "opportunities for long-term cooperation".

Assad invited Russia to the region because "Russia has an enormous role, and has a lot of respect from Third World countries ... which really hope that Russia will try to revive the positions it used to hold". He added that US foreign policy on Iraq was "disastrous". Ever since the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, Syria has been threatened by both Israel and the US.

In end September the Syrian army's chief-of-staff General Ali Habib during his four-day visit to Russia held discussions to further upgrade his country's weapons and further strengthen defense cooperation between Moscow and Damascus. He discussed with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov ways for "maintenance and modernization of Syrian military equipment by Russian experts, the training of Syrian military officers in Russian military academies from 30 to 60 and future purchases of Russian weapons," a Russian defense ministry statement said. General Ali Habib also visited a weapons factory specializing in high-precision anti-tank rockets in Tula region south of Moscow which produces small arms, "active armored" systems and Kornet-E anti-tank missiles.

Russia and China are equally determined to oppose any sanctions against Iran in its legitimate pursuit of the nuclear fuel cycle for power generation as permitted under the Nuclear Non- Proliferation Treaty. This was discussed at the SCO meeting in Moscow on 26 October, of Iran along with India and Pakistan are observers. Russia and China along with other SCO members have stopped USA in its tracks in its efforts to install puppet regimes in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan through its street organized "Franchised revolutions" with open supports and funds from US institutions. In September, Russia and China organized the first ever wide ranging and complex military exercises along the Chinese coast to send home the message to the West.

Russian media reported that Bashar al-Assad telephoned President Putin on 25 October and expressed readiness for "the broadest cooperation" with the UN commission. Putin urged cooperation and said Moscow supported "cautious actions on the part of the international community on this issue in order to avoid new sources of tension in the region," On the same day, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke with his Chinese counterpart Li Zhaoxing about the situation in

Lebanon and Syria in the context of the UN investigation. RTR reported that both Russia and China indicated they would veto UN sanctions on Syria.

USA's double standards.

The presumption of innocence which Bush cited for Libby does not apply to hundreds of detainees, some even American citizens in Guantanamo prison, described by the Amnesty International as present day Gulag, which even felt impelled to ask foreign governments to investigate and take action if necessary against US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other senior officials, citing the arrest warrants and possible trial of Chilean dictator Pinochet.

Cheney has replaced Libby with David Addington and John Hannah. Addington is the author of legal memos justifying torture of prisoners held by the US abroad, in direct contradiction of US treaty obligations under international law. Hannah spread disinformation produced by Ahmad Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress about Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction. It is clear that Karl Rove, Bush's top aide told Matt Cooper of Time Magazine about Valerie Plame Wilson, whose CIA cover was blown; it is an offence

It is a moot point whether a beleaguered Bush administration, perhaps mortally injured by the indicting of Libby and further hearings, would try to divert attention abroad by more propaganda crusades against Syrian and Iranian Presidents and even some foolhardy adventure. This administration has little credibility left at home and abroad and its actions are doing incalculable harm to the standing and prestige of upright US citizens and courageous whistle blowers like Ambassador Wilson, whose report triggered the actions, which have culminated in the first ever such an indictment in the history of the White House.

It appears that for all practical purposes George Bush is now a dead lame duck Presidents and perhaps deservedly so. A former Neo-Con wrote to this author, that Bush Junior was chosen by the Neocons who have brought USA to such a sorry pass, because he was a blank slate to write on their megalomaniac plans.

The statement by the new inexperienced President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad of Iran was taken up by US leadership and the West to mount a media crusade to browbeat Iran as they have failed to cow it down otherwise.

It is the Iranians who during a millennia of rule by foreigners like Arabs, Turks, Mongols and others , mostly Sunnis , gave legal and religious sanction to lie under duress called takkiya, i.e., not bringing to the lips what is on the mind. However, it is the West, which is now employing takkiya. U.S.-led Anglo Saxon illegal invasion of Iraq was called " Operation Iraqi Freedom " , when it is clear to everyone that it was nothing but a blatant 21st-century attempt to take over Iraq's petroleum resources and control the petro-region from Baghdad. In the process it cooked up causes belly like the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, Iraq's relationship with Al Qaida, its program for nuclear weaponisation .For the last excuse to invade Iraq, Bush relied on cooked up intelligence reports that Iraq was trying to get Uranium or from Niger. In addition, when former US Ambassador Wilson, who went to ascertain if it were true and felt that it was wrong and exposed the Bush Administration lies, he and his wife were harassed to intimidate other whistle blowers.

Nevertheless, do not underestimate this double takkiya by Ahmedinejad. The centers of Sunni Islam in the region are Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, with Sunni majority Syria ruled by Shiia Alawaite minority. Iraq has been almost destroyed and taken over by the Shiia Iraqis, remote controlled yet from Tehran. Egypt, where its pro US ruler Hosni Mubarak in power since 1981 has been recently re-elected in a sham election for another term, promotes US policies and has little popularity among Muslims. Saudi Arabia like other Sunni states is on tenterhooks in case of breakup of Iraq and has expressed its concerns publicly.

In the Arab and Muslim world, support to the Palestinian cause has been the touchstone and the barometer of the Muslim Ummah's cause. For long, its main and defiant supporter was Saddam Hussein, who continued to send money to the families of martyrs in the occupied Palestine. Not only in the eyes of the Arabs and Muslims, Israel, fully supported by USA and partially by West European countries, now remains the focus of Muslim Jihad in a millennium old warfare. By threatening to wipe out Israel from the map, the Iranian President is trying to take over the leadership of the Arab and Muslim Street, which was earlier with Saddam Hussein. Some world leaders have condemned remarks by President Ahmedinejad, who has only repeated the words of the late Ayatollah Ruho-Allah Khomeini, leader of the Islamic revolution, by saying: "Israel must be wiped off the map."

It is a moot point if a beleaguered George Bush administration, perhaps mortally injured politically after a grand jury indication of Libby, to divert attention abroad ,would focus even more on Syrian and Iranian Presidents by exploiting its media control , 90% owned by 5 conglomerates . This administration has little credibility left at home and abroad. An original neo-con wrote to the author, that Bush was chosen by the new cons because he was a blank slate on which they wrote their megalomaniac plans.

In reaction to Western denunciations, Ahmedinejad defiantly marched in the streets of Tehran alongside tens of thousands of people supporting his call for the destruction of Israel .The rally was one of several anti-Israel demonstrations across the country that drew more than a million Iranians. He accused the West "They think they are the

absolute rulers of the world," he added.

UN Report's Star witness al-Sadiq a convicted embezzler - Der Spiegel

According to Hamburg's "Der Spiegel" of 22 October, the alleged intelligence agent al-Sadik, 42, on whose testimony a considerable portion of Mehlis investigation is based, has been convicted of, embezzlement and fraud, among other crimes. Even within the UN Commission investigating the Hariri murder, there is doubt on the credibility of the Syrian witness. According to a statement by his brother, Sadik had called him from Paris in late summer and said, "I've become a millionaire!" (For giving false testimony!) Mehlis was contacted through the Syrian dissident Rifaat al-Assad, an uncle of President Bashar al-Assad, who opposes his nephew in Damascus.

Hariri murder UN investigator Detlev Mehlis has doubtful integrity

Executive Director of the London based Institute for Policy Research & Development and Sussex University Prof NM Ahmed has cast doubts on the integrity of "Detlev Mehlis", who as Berlin public prosecutor, "inadvertently but consistently covered up the dubious involvement of US, Israeli and German intelligence interests in the 1986 terrorist attack; actively built a selective politically-motivated case against suspects without objective material proof; while ignoring and protecting a group of suspects with documented connections to western secret services." This fundamentally tarnishes the credibility of his investigation.

Mehlis prosecuted numerous terrorism and organized crime cases including the 1982 bombing of the La Belle Discotheque in West Berlin, promptly blamed by the Reagan administration on Libya to justify the US bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi, killing at least 30 Libyan civilians including children.

US National Security Agency intercepted coded exchanges between Tripoli and the East Berlin Libyan Peoples Bureau saying "We have something that will make you happy", and another after the bombing: "An event occurred. You will be pleased with the result." But in his sworn testimony for the Lockable trial, former Israeli intelligence colonel Victor Ostrovsky admitted that Israeli Mossad's commandos had set up the transmitter in Tripoli to send false telex signals about the "success" of the Berlin bomb. (In 1990, US had produced for the Saudi rulers, concocted aerial photographs of Iraqi forces in an attack mode against the Kingdom to persuade them to accept US forces. These are standard Anglo-Saxon and Mossad tricks)

An investigation by German public television's Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF) broadcast on 25th August 1998 reported that several leading suspects in the Berlin disco bombing were being protected from prosecution by western intelligence services. According to Russian and East German intelligence services, the group worked for western intelligence. Full details on Detlev Mehlis capers are given in Mediainternational.net website of 30 October 2005.

There is thus doubt that Mehlis's investigations might conceal the role of US and Israeli intelligence interests in relation to the Hariri assassination.

The Report;

The international investigation was never mandated to make clear-cut accusations. As Mehlis clearly states in the final paragraph of the 54 page-long reports -- a summary of over 16,000 pages of documents the team collected during the course of its work -- only further investigations and a fair trial can prove the guilt or innocence of any given party. Mehlis also stated that the "investigation is not complete," and the UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, subsequently extended the inquiry until Dec. 15. However, the prosecutor had enough confidence in the information he had garnered to add that there is "converging evidence pointing at both Lebanese and Syrian involvement in this terrorist act." The investigators further underlined that the Hariri assassination was prepared over several months, and was "carried out by a group with an extensive organization and considerable resources and capabilities."

Mehlis concluded that Hariri's assassination was so complex that it would be difficult to imagine that the Syrian and Lebanese intelligence services did not know about it. The assassination decision "could not have been taken without the approval of top-ranked Syrian security official and could not have been further organized without the collusion of their counterparts in the Lebanese security services.". Clearly, it is not a report with judicial rectitude.

Condi goes off the handle again,

Change of unfriendly regimes in the Middle East is one constant theme of US policy. In her testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 19th October, Condoleezza Rice confirmed that the administration's strategy after 9/11 had always been to redesign the Middle East. Iraq was merely the first step in that broader strategy. As for regime change in Damascus, reportedly a US official even asked the Italian Senate President to suggest a replacement for Assad.

US President George W Bush told the pan-Arab Al-Arabia TV channels that force would be used against Syria only as "the last -- the very last -- option". As also against Iran! Nevertheless, all options are on the table.

As usual Condi Rice went off the handle after the report "There must be some way to assure accountability," said Ms Rice, adding that the international community would have "no real credibility" if it failed to take punitive action. Her unabashed rhetoric, tone and use of language, compared to Gen Colin Powell's, have exposed the hollowness of her so-called scholarship.

Why not the international criminal court for investigation [which the US opposes]."Everyone knows the United States' view of the international criminal court," said Ms Rice. "That view is not going to change."

Wrote academic and former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury in the Reagan administration, Paul Craig Roberts."Grasping a UN report that uses unreliable witnesses to implicate Syria in the assassination of a former Lebanese government official, Condi Rice told the BBC on October 23 that Syria's crime cannot be "left lying on the table. This really has to be dealt with."

"This is amazing for many reasons. Here is the person in charge of US diplomacy acting as if she is the secretary of war unsheathing military force. Whoever heard of an American diplomat wanting to start a war because a former Middle Eastern government official was assassinated?"

"The UN investigator, Detlev Mehlis, has no more idea who assassinated the former official than the US knows who is responsible for assassinating the many Iraqi officials under its protection. After more than two and one-half years of war in Iraq, the US still does not know exactly who the enemy is that it is fighting. Yet Mehlis blames Syria for an assassination on the strength of an informer described by the German news magazine, Der Spiegel, as a convicted felon and swindler.

On the basis of the word of a convicted felon and swindler, Condi Rice wants a high level UN Security Council meeting to condemn Syria so the Bush administration can bring about "regime change" in Syria."

The accusations are based on convergences, guess and innuendo." I think the report is far from professional and will not lead us to the truth," Syria's information minister, Mahdi Dakhllallah, told al-Jazeera television. Syria's ambassador to the US, Imad Moustapha, said the accusations "will only help fuel anti-American sentiment around the world".

Syria –Lebanon linkages and US- Israeli moves;

The Syrian-Lebanese relations are very complex as historically Lebanon was part of greater Syria as was Palestine including Israel and Jordan.

For decades, Lebanon has been the center for regional and international power play, involving many Arab countries, Israel and the United States. These powers manipulated and even created the countries' political alliances, supplied funds and weapons, helped some players and marginalized others.

If Syria has naturally its own alliances, Israel also maintains proxies, as does USA with its right wing Lebanese Christians, as also France. Iran has its militias, and even Iraq, during the Ba'ath party reign, had its own supporters. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was also a significant power broker throughout the 1970s, until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, in which tens of thousands of Lebanese and Palestinians were killed. Since then, Palestinians have been confined to their refugee camps in the wake of the expulsion of PLO forces.

With so many competing forces in Lebanon, whether internally or externally, who keep their proxies and meddle in the country's affairs, to criticize Syria alone for Lebanon's misfortunes, past and present, and to solely single out Damascus as the only likely suspect in Hariri's murder on the evidence of a convicted embezzler by the German investigator is just western trickery ." It is ironic that those who have for long contributed to Lebanon's demise are now the main players in leading the faultfinding chorus, demanding justice and the "truth".

What ever may be Syria's record in Lebanon, Damascus was not alone responsible for increasing troubles in Lebanon." It certainly had more to do with sheltering and benefiting Syria itself, an objective that often led to abuses of power, unwarranted interference in Lebanon's political affairs and ultimately to near complete hegemony over the country's sovereignty." However, Syria was invited to keep peace in Lebanon by US, UN and the Arab states at the time of the Civil war.

While US wants to bring "the perpetrators of Hariri's killing to justice" - as phrased by the State Department – the administration is pressuring Congressional lawmakers to exempt the CIA from a proposed ban on the "cruel, inhuman or

degrading treatment or punishment" of anyone held by US authorities, mostly Arabs and Muslims.

It appears that the US foreign-policy approach to Syria is in line with the infamous report prepared for the Israeli government in 1996, by the individuals who manipulated US foreign policy to build a case for war on Iraq, namely Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and David Wurmser, among others. "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm" counseled that "given the nature of the regime in Damascus, it is both natural and moral that Israel abandon the slogan 'comprehensive peace' and move to contain Syria, drawing attention to its weapons of mass destruction program, and rejecting 'land for peace' deals on the Golan Heights".

It recommended that Israel should establish "the precedent that Syrian territory is not immune to attacks emanating from Lebanon by Israeli proxy forces". It also read: "Israel can shape its strategic environment, in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq - an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right - as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions."

While US Senator Barbara Boxer had chided Condi Rice when the latter said that the Asian Sunami was an opportunity (to improve tattered US image) the assassination of the Hariri is thus another opportunity to extract more concessions from Damascus, which is standing up to the Israeli expansionism and American crusade.

On Lebanon, UK MP George Galloway, recently warned that a civil war was on the brink in Lebanon. He also called upon the Lebanese opposition not to transform Lebanon into a "knife in Syria's back". "During his visit to Lebanon, he felt that the elements of the Lebanese civil war, which ended in 1989, are now back and Lebanon has become a dangerous place now, alluding to Michel Aoun's return and Samir Ja'ja's release from jail, both of whom were the primary architects in the 15-year civil war. "Lebanon was currently witnessing an 'atmosphere of war' following the February 14 assassination of Hariri and the subsequent explosions targeting key Lebanese political figures.

Russia-Syria-Israel triangle;

Moscow would "not disrupt the absence of balance!"

Sergey Lavrov two-day working visit to Israel ending on 28 despite friendly atmosphere failed to produce an understanding on any of the key problems in bilateral relations. Israel was disappointed with Russian failure to share its concerns over Syria and Iran. Russia's proposal to hold an international conference on Palestine fell on Israel's deaf ears. Lavrov and Israeli Foreign Minister Sylvan Shalom made only short statements to hide the disagreements between them on key questions. Lavrov expressed opposition to sanctions against Syria regarding the assassination of Hariri. "Syria has to be drawn into the investigation and not accused as a state. At this stage, the imposition of sanctions is excessive," Lavrov declared... Shalom did not agree with him.

Russian diplomats assured the Israelis that the promise made by Putin in his April visit that it would not provide Syria with arms that could disrupt the balance of power in the region would be kept. One Russian diplomat accompanying Lavrov joked that Moscow would "not disrupt the absence of balance," apparently referring to Israel's military superiority over its Arab neighbors. In Israel, they react nervously to such jokes.

Growing concern over Iran's pursuit of a nuclear capability was the chief topic of the ministers' meeting, Shalom revealed that Israel is greatly concerned that Iran is close to producing a nuclear bomb, he said, warning that Israel "must take every necessary step" to prevent what he termed "a nightmare for us and for Russia." Israel reportedly has over 100 nuclear bombs.

Syrian reaction:

Post UN resolution, Syria requested an emergency Arab League summit to rally regional support in the face of stern UN Security Council action. However, as history has shown Anglo-Saxons have exploited Arab disunity throughout history. Instead of a summit of all 22 members, a smaller gathering of Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Lebanon and Egypt might be organized if others decline afraid of upsetting the United States, France and Britain. Arab league remains an ineffective organization.

With most members being Sunnis, Arab League offices based in Cairo (like the influence of Saudis on OIC based in the Kingdom) and President Mubarak doing Washington's bidding not much will be done to aid Shiia Alawite Assad. The author who was posted in Amman (1989-92) knows how efforts by late King Hussein of Jordan and others to find an Arab solution to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait were undone by Mubarak at US command. He was amply rewarded for this action.

The Syria Times said the resolution as drafted was "openly politicized" and too heavily influenced by the United States." It's immoral and totally unacceptable that the will of the (international) community remains captive to a unilateral diktat and ... accepts tyranny and hegemony," the paper said.

Tishrin, another government newspaper, criticized the proposed UN document as "tough and unbalanced" and urged the Security Council to adopt "a balanced and objective" resolution "that would not be a clear translation of the US administration's will."

Al Thawra daily said the United States wants Syria to "be stripped of its skin, abandon its regional and national role and be turned into a marginal state that carries out orders."

Mass pro-government demonstrations were held in Damascus and Aleppo "Wake up Arabs, your turn will come soon!" said one banner. Wrote a Western commentators "The officially organized protests were a reminder that despite public dissatisfaction over living standards, 20% unemployment, and falling oil income, the regime still knows how to exploit nationalist sentiment - and faces little conventional political opposition" Would these pompous experts like to usher in democracy as in Iraq, with over 50% unemployment, rampaging anarchy and insecurity and almost total destruction of the state's infrastructure and robbing of Iraqi peoples oil money by US overlords and their quislings and supporters

Tens of thousands of Lebanese attended an anti-Israel Hizbullahs parade in Beirut's southern suburb in a show of force by the group facing US-led pressure to disarm in line with a 14-month-old UN resolution.

"We say clearly that we stand by Syria, leadership and people, in the face of its targeting by the Americans and Zionists and attempts to punish it politically for standing by Lebanon and its resistance," Hizbullahs chief Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah told the rally. "What we are witnessing today is the using of the Mehlis report to punish Syria for a crime that it has not been convicted of as a punishment for its political and strategic options," Nasrallah said.

Malik al-Abdeh, spokesman for the exiled Movement for Justice and Development opposition party, warned "The Sunni Salafist movement with its Jihadis offshoots is a growing force within Syria, especially among the rural young," he said. "This movement is not under the influence of traditional Islamists parties like the Muslim Brotherhood. It is a relatively new phenomenon; greatly boosted by the Iraq insurgency... it represents the strongest challenge to the regime on the ground."

Like Ahmed Chalabi in Iraq, Mr. Abdeh wants to takeover in Syria as US wants "a more seasoned and pragmatic politician than Bashar" to confront the Islamists. Another expert Rime Allaf, a Syria expert at the think tank Chatham House said, "I think a number of countries are telling them this is not the time - even the Israelis. It's in their interest to have a weakened Syria, a Syria on its knees, but not a Syria in chaos." What an easy picking Iraq had looked from Washington.

Some opposition in USA

Ron Paul (R-TX) speaking in the US House of Representatives on October 26, said "Prepare for a broader war in the Middle East, as plans are being laid for the next U.S.-led regime change – in Syria. A UN report on the death of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri elicited this comment from a senior U.S. policy maker: "Out of tragedy comes an extraordinary strategic opportunity." This statement reflects the continued neo-conservative, Machiavellian influence on our foreign policy. The "opportunity" refers to the long-held neo-conservative plan for regime change in Syria, similar to what was carried out in Iraq.

"This plan for remaking the Middle East has been around for a long time. Just as 9/11 served the interests of those who longed for changes in Iraq, the sensationalism surrounding Hariri's death is being used to advance plans to remove Assad.

"Syria was castigated for placing its troops in Lebanon, a neighboring country, although such action was invited by an elected government and encouraged by the United States. The Syrian occupation of Lebanon elicited no suicide terrorist attacks, as was suffered by Western occupiers.

"Condemning Syria for having troops in Lebanon seems strange, considering most of the world sees our 150,000 troops in Iraq as an unwarranted foreign occupation. Syrian troops were far more welcome in Lebanon. The statement that should scare all Americans (and the world) is the assurance by Secretary Rice that the President needs no additional authority from Congress to attack Syria. She argues that authority already has been granted by the resolutions on 9/11 and Iraq. This is not true."

President Putin spoke to Iranian President Ahmedinejad on 25 October about Iran's nuclear program and possible action by the UN Security Council according to Russian media. He reiterated that the standoff over Iranian nuclear activities should be resolved "by political means within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]. Putin also reportedly suggested that Iranian cooperation with the IAEA be broadened and Tehran's talks with EU-3 (Britain, France, and Germany) be resumed. Russia reportedly would propose a compromise plan, under which Iran could process uranium ore, but not enrich uranium or produce nuclear fuel, AFP reported

NATO –SCO competition in Central Asia;

The one day meeting of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Moscow on 26 October was attended by Mongolian Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, Prime Minister Tsakhiagiyn Elbegdorzh, Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh, and Iranian First Vice President Parviz Davudi in Moscow on 26 October agreed on a "road map" that will include agreements on mutual cooperation in emergency situations and signed several economic accords.

Speaking at a meeting President Putin said the SCO had become an "influential factor" in the world. He said that "the total population of SCO member countries and observer countries is more than 3 billion people, and during such meetings the leaders of these countries, the heads of the governments of our countries, make and will continue to make decisions that influence the social and economic well-being of an overwhelming majority of the population of our planet." Putin added that joint antiterrorism efforts remain a priority for the SCO, equating the recent terrorist attacks in Nalchik with the unrest in Uzbekistan in May as "examples of the terrorist threat."

The SCO comprises Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, while Iran, India, Pakistan, and Mongolia enjoy observer status. India among observer countries wants to become full member. What if Iran too joins then SCO would stretch right up to eastern Mediterranean via Iran, Syria and Lebanon of the Hizbullahs.

Russian Parliament (Duma) Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Konstantin Kosachev rejected western media claims that the SCO represented an effort to create a new anti-NATO military alliance. It is classical western media logic that everything that happens in the world without their country is directed against it, Kosachev added. Politika Foundation head Vyacheslav Nikonov said contradictions between SCO members like China, India, and Pakistan were so great that talk of a military bloc was impossible now and in the foreseeable future, but the human resources and economic potential of the SCO made Western concerns understandable. In 20 years, China and India could become the largest and third-largest economies in the world with the nuclear and energy superpower Russia the fifth-largest economy in the world.

CIS Institute Deputy Director Vladimir Zharikhin said that Russia and Kazakhstan are unhappy that 90 percent of their energy resources are exported to the West, when the center of global economic development is shifting eastward in the region of SCO. He said, "We might like European culture, but Russia's economic interests will be directed toward the centers of accelerating economic growth, namely China and India."

Yes, Pakistan, USA's non-Nato ally remains a center of terrorism, with many attempts on the life of its ruler President Gen Musharraf's life from inside its military ranks. While India and Pakistan have made progress on peace, Indian Prime Minister was forced to tell Gen Musharraf those terrorists who killed over 60 Indians in bomb blasts in Delhi before the festivals of Hindus and Muslims originated from Pakistan controlled areas.

Curiously, NATO has now officially entered Pakistan Kashmir to help post earthquake relief operations. However, would it leave! More so because when US foolishly tried to over reach in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to install friendly rulers through its "franchised street level revolutions, but failed. So US is unlikely to give up its control over Pakistan exercised through its armed forces and its intelligence services ISI, forged with Pakistan's Gen Ayub Khan since 1958. With Gen Musharraf rightly suspicious of his own military ranks, as the latest sentences passed on those who tried to murder him in end 2003 thrice reveals, he might not be averse to Nato Military presence as another intelligence window, apart from many US FBI agents already active in Pakistan. USA and the West which acquiesced in Pakistan making the nuclear bombs for its support against USSR in Afghanistan now remain worried about Pakistani nukes in case extremists try to take over in Pakistan. Pakistan military has shown little compunction in selling nuclear technology and equipment to countries like Libya, Iran and some others too.

(Gajendra Singh., served as Indian Ambassador to Turkey and Azerbaijan in 1992 -96. Prior to that, he served as ambassador to Jordan (during the 1990 - 91 Gulf war), Romania and Senegal. He is currently chairman of the Foundation for Indo-Turkic Studies, in Bucharest. The views expressed here are his own

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