

To Brink and Back

- and then back to the brink

It was a laudable effort – and deservedly applauded. Wars going south or wherever; are always good for a surprise. How they will end has therefore never been easy to foretell. The latest round in the Middle East is as good a case as any.

Not the first time Iran demonstrated resilience and its prowess with the projectiles. Last year's exchange with Israel had the latter on the run but as the US joined the fray scales tilted against the clerics. The offensive that Washington and Tel Aviv launched on the 28th of February this year was so sudden and severe that it wasn't easy to bet on the chances of Tehran recovering from the strikes. Drone Doctrine turned the landscape upside-down and the closure of Hormuz overturned the odds. To proclaim that the underdogs had now clinched the issue, sounds good but too good to have happened. With the war expanding not only horizontally but also in all possible dimensions – unconventional; psychological; and cyberspace – Pakistan pulled a rabbit out of a hat full of bombs and bombshells.

Even the unschooled in the art of negotiations could see that the path was littered with mines and boobytraps. If someone sensible and foresighted suggested that on a couple of carefully selected points, an agreement on the back channel would give the process a good start; I do not know. It's quite possible though that the time constraint or the temptation to kick it off in a high-profile event swayed our leadership to launch the spectacle over the last weekend. As of now, the first round seems to have given Israel a free hand: it can bomb Lebanon and the Palestinians without any fear of reprisals from the mad mullahs. The US too found the post ceasefire environment conducive to impose a blockade that could not have been done when Iran was pounding all things American all over the Gulf.

What next is the question more important.

Hoping for the best but preparing for the worst was taught to us right from the school. I'm sure Iran is all primed for another encounter with both the great and the real Satan. And if the idea was to ensure it would not come to that, I wonder if any of the peacemakers were thinking how to go about it! Countries have a range of options – all the way from twiddling thumbs, to sub-conventional warfare, and to launching of the doomsday armament. Since none of our stalwarts were likely to go beyond a tweet a week, let's console ourselves that another exchange of missiles would let Iran finish the job Trump might have wished but didn't have the guts to undertake: shed the tail that keeps wagging the Yankee dog. But what if Iran, winner of the first round, came out second best this time around!

America First left the country fending for itself with its closest allies sitting on the fence. Delusion about Pakistan First prevented us from joining the Palestinians and the Iranians in their fight against the evil nexus. God forbid if the Persian shield was breached, Pakistan Next was written on the wall. The best course still is to build upon the momentum that led to the high noon in Islamabad but with a little more care to get the community on board.

Any blood fool can start a war, making peace but needs all the right hands on deck.

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