**Brink of war**

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Historically, the Middle East region has witnessed unrest, turmoil and instability for a long time.

The Arab-Israel conflict, Iran-Iraq war, invasion of Kuwait, Gulf war, US attack on Iraq, rise and fall of Isis, Houthi rebels in Yemen, Arab Spring, Syrian civil war and other incidents clearly indicate that the internal situation in the Middle East is getting worse day by day.

This tense situation has not only affected the oil supply to the world but a price hike is also being observed in the international market. In my article, ‘Yet another challenge’, published in these pages on September 20, 2019, I warned that: “In this regional scenario, various global powers are also playing critical role.”

Even today, public opinion is not in favour of America’s aggressive policies. It seems that different anti-US forces want to give a tough time by taking advantage of the US-Iran conflict. The US, being the only superpower, is supposed to ensure world peace and stability throughout the globe. However, unnecessary involvement is creating a mess for Americans as well.

The target killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in a drone attack by the US proved that such a dangerous move has enormously increased the risks of a Third World War. The Iranian leadership also announced in clear words that it would take revenge.

In such a critical time, when the Iranian nation is mourning the assassination of late General Soleimani, Iran has successfully targeted US military bases in Iraq with ballistic missiles. According to media reports, Iran has also warned all allies of the United States that any aggression against Iran will be responded to promptly.

It was crystal clear that Iran would take revenge but the question was: how, where and at what time? On various TV talk shows, I had said that it is not possible for Iran to directly attack the US. However, Iran is in a position to target US military bases in neighbouring Arab countries or harm US interests through a proxy war with the help of non-state actors.

The uncertain situation has made neighbouring countries anxious and millions of people of the region are currently scared. As Pakistani citizen, I am concerned about how we can keep our country safe from this disturbing situation. In my view, when our eastern and western borders are already tense, another new war across the Iranian border would obviously increase our difficulties.

The recent US-Iran tension also revived memories of 9/11, when Pakistan had to face a similar challenge. At that time too, the US was looking towards Pakistan for playing the most critical role of frontline state and today again we may find ourselves in a similar situation.

The American leadership must learn from the bitter experiences of former superpower USSR. Just three decades ago, the world was divided into two blocs, and the USSR was competing in every field of life. However, only one wrong decision related to Afghanistan resulted in the collapse of the USSR.

The Iranian culture is one of the most prominent cultures in the world. Iran is also considered one of the cradles of civilization on the basis of its geopolitical importance over centuries. It is also a historical fact that no foreign power has succeeded in controlling Iran so far. It is very unfortunate that Iranian cultural heritage sites are also under threat.

Today, the entire Iranian nation is on one page for revenge. Thousands of people have participated in performing the last rites of the late general. However, this is a need to demonstrate patience, endurance and wisdom. In my view, further Iranian attacks against American bases may provide justification to the US for a full-fledged military attack. Therefore, Iran should not take any step in haste that could put world peace in danger.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, we must stay away from the ongoing conflict. Just like showing unity on the Army Amendment Act, all parliamentarians must join hands for defining our strategy to tackle this challenge. We must give a clear message to the world that the territory of Pakistan will never ever be used against any country. This is very important in the sense that our role in the US-Iran tussle may not only harm our diplomatic relations but a large portion of our population may become uncomfortable too.

It is indeed a good sign that the US Congress is interested in curbing the president’s war powers. Let’s hope that peace-loving Americans will succeed in putting pressure on their leadership for playing a positive role to achieve peace and stability in the Middle-Eastern region.

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